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INSPECTOR WILLIAMS' GREAT CASE.

BY HAROLD PAYNE.



He approached nearer, step by step.

The Gold Brick Sharps;

OR,

The Arch Schemer's Jugglery.

A Story of the Mystic Brotherhood.

BY HAROLD PAYNE.

CHAPTER I.

A DEEP PLOT.

"Does the Widow Maynard live in this neighborhood?"

"I don't know of any widow of that name; but my name is Maynard."

"What is your first name?"

"Earnest."

"Earnest Maynard?" mused the first speaker, taking a paper from his pocket and examining it.

The first speaker was a tall, powerfully-built man, with long hair and a heavy mustache, and from his dress and general air one would have imagined him to be a recent arrival from the far West.

The other was a well-to-do market-gardener, scarcely more than thirty, but whose keen, shrewd face and cold, gray, penetrating eye, gave him the appearance of being much older.

It was easily discernible to any stranger, as it was well-known to his neighbors, that Earnest Maynard was a shrewd man—one who could drive a sharp bargain and the last one in the world to be taken in by a swindler.

Maynard was at work in his "truck-patch," not far from Kingsbridge, just above New York City, although it was long past the crop season, when the stranger rode up, and approached the fence to talk to the soil-tiller.

"I am looking for the heirs of Horace Maynard," pursued the stranger, raising his eyes at length from the paper which he had taken from his pocket, "and I was informed that your widow lived somewhere about here."

"Horace Maynard?" echoed the farmer, apparently struck with the name. "Why, father's name was Horace."

The stranger shook his head.

"I do not see yours among the list of names given as the heirs. Are you sure there is no widow of the name living hereabouts, sir?"

"There may be, but I never heard of her. My mother was a widow, but she is dead. Besides, she lived up near Newburg."

Again the stranger shook his head mysteriously, and responded:

"I'm afraid I've got hold of the wrong family. I shall have to look further. Good-day!"

And, bowing stiffly, the stranger rode away.

Gardener Maynard was perplexed.

What could the inquirer want?

Evidently, from the fact of his allusion to heirs, there was money or property connected with his business, and forthwith the greedy gardener fell to dreaming of untold wealth which had doubtless been left to some person or persons of his name, and already he burned with envy that he was not one of the heirs, or, what would have suited him better, sole heir to the supposed wealth.

Needless to say, he was unable to drive the vision from his mind for the rest of the day, or do much else but think of and speculate upon the matter.

It was with a degree of delight, therefore, when, along toward night, the stranger again put in an appearance, this time at Maynard's house.

The gardener was sure now that he was to be included among the heirs of the supposed man of wealth, and was not mistaken, as the stranger's subsequent conversation proved.

"I find upon investigation," began the stranger, as soon as they were alone in the gardener's little sitting-room, "that there is an Earnest Maynard among the heirs; in fact, he is the eldest son of the late Horace Maynard. Have you any knowledge what became of your father, Mr. Maynard?"

"I have not, sir," replied the other, waxing momentarily more interested. "He went while I was a child, to seek his fortune

in the gold regions, and we have never heard from him since."

"Ah!" exclaimed the stranger, again referring to his papers, "this tallies with my record. What year did your father go West?"

"Some time in the 'fifties."

"Exactly. And you never heard from him afterward?"

"Well, yes; my mother received one or two letters from him after he reached the gold-fields, and then he became silent. But we afterward learned, through some returning gold-seekers, that he and a party of prospectors had been surprised and captured by the Indians, but we never heard what their fate was, and supposed that they had all been massacred by the savages."

The stranger was silent for some time, and appeared to be absorbed in his papers.

Finally he looked up and resumed:

"Your account tallies with mine, sir, up to the time of the capture by the Indians. And you could not be expected to know the facts beyond that time. The fact is, your father was not killed, having made his escape from the savages, but his comrades were not so fortunate, for they were all massacred. Your father, it seems, after escaping from the Indians, wandered about from place to place for a long time, and at last fell in with another prospecting party who were on their way to another gold-field. Here he settled down upon a claim, and, after working it for several months, attended with the most terrible privations, he struck a rich lode of ore."

He was not alone on the claim. An Indian who had assisted him in making his escape was his partner. They were the warmest of friends, and shared each other's comforts and hardships alike, like brothers.

"The mine yielded a good deal of wealth, and it was your father's intention to come East very soon and look up his family, but about three months ago he was stricken with mountain-fever and died."

"For five-years previous to his death I had known and enjoyed his friendship, and it was I who nursed him through his last illness, and I may say that he died in my arms."

At this point the stranger paused to bury his face in his hands, overcome, it would seem, with grief at the loss of his friend.

After a time, however, he mastered his feelings enough to continue.

"Before he died," he said, "your father confided to me the secret of his buried wealth, and the names of his wife and children, and asked me to look you up and turn over his wealth to you."

Maynard was so overwhelmed with gratitude that he could not refrain from grasping the stranger by the hand and pressing it warmly.

"God bless you, sir!" he cried in a husky voice. "I do not know how I shall ever repay you for all this kindness!"

"Do not mention it, my dear sir!" protested the stranger. "I did nothing but my duty, as any other honest man would have done, but I cannot deny that it affords me a great deal of pleasure to find you sensible of it. But, let us get down to business. As you may suppose, the wealth left by your father is all in gold, and amounts to about fifty thousand dollars. It was your father's will, as I can prove to you by papers which he left, that I should have one-third of the wealth, part of which is due me for money lent your father, and the remainder is to repay me for the trouble and expense I have been to in looking up the heirs."

"Perfectly just," interposed Maynard, who had grown generous at the prospect of his good fortune. "Perfectly just, and you shall have every cent that my father intended that you should have."

"Thank you, sir," responded the stranger, feelingly. "You are very kind, but I hardly think it right that I should take that amount. There is a matter of ten thousand dollars coming to me—which amount I lent your father when he was sinking his shaft and before he struck 'pay-dirt,' as we say out in the mines, and for which I hold his note. This I shall accept and nothing more."

"But the expense to which you have been put?" modestly suggested Maynard.

"That is but trifling," observed the stranger lightly. "Five hundred dollars will cover everything."

"Then you shall have that, at least."

"Just as you say," said the other with a careless shrug. "I am not a man of wealth, so five hundred dollars is a good deal of money to me. If you so will it, I shall be only too willing to accept it, but as for interest on the amount of notes, we will say nothing about that."

And the miserly market-gardener did not urge him to take it.

His greed was too great to allow of any further show of generosity than he had already exhibited; so he adroitly avoided any additional allusion to the matter, lest the stranger might change his mind and claim interest on the note.

"And now," resumed the stranger, rising, "as we understand each other, I will go and fetch the gold."

"Oh, you have it here, have you?" cried Maynard with hungry eyes.

"It is in the city. I deposited it in a safety deposit vault, as I knew it would not be safe in any other place."

"You can't get it to-night, then?"

"No, but you shall see me to-morrow. By the way, we have said nothing about the other heirs, but I suppose you will look out for them, Mr. Maynard?"

"Yes, I'll look out for them," assured the gardener, with a knowing look.

CHAPTER II.

THE GOLD BRICKS.

THAT night was spent by Earnest Maynard in anxiety and sleeplessness. He could see nothing but the vision of the gold he was to receive the following day, and when at last he left his bed, worn and weary, but still serenely happy, he could hardly wait for the return of the noble stranger.

But wait he was compelled to do, and that until nearly night of the following day.

Then the stranger came, but to the gardener's disappointment, he did not seem to have brought the gold, for he only carried a small satchel, which, Maynard guessed, was far too small to contain fifty thousand dollars' worth of gold.

"Well," began the stranger, putting down the satchel, "I presume you thought I was never coming back."

"Oh, no," replied Maynard, staring greedily at the bag. "I knew you would be back, only I was naturally a little anxious. Did you bring the gold?"

"Not all of it, only a sample. The whole amount is too bulky to carry, and I had it removed to a room in the hotel where I am stopping. If you are satisfied that it is all right, and everything is satisfactory, we will go down with a conveyance and get it."

"Why, I thought everything was arranged last night," assumed Maynard, with a look of disappointment. "What is there to arrange more than we have already arranged?"

"Well, in the first place, there are the other heirs. I do not believe that I will be carrying out the spirit of your father's will unless I look up the rest of the heirs and see that the money is equally divided among them."

"Oh, you needn't bother your head about them," protested Maynard immediately. "As I told you last night, I will see that they are taken care of."

"I am very sorry," returned the other with a grave countenance, "but it would not be right for me to trust to your word entirely in the matter. I have no doubt you will carry out your promise, but if anything should happen, you know, the blame would be on me."

Maynard was in a state of perplexity.

He did not relish the idea of any of the other heirs sharing the wealth with him, and was willing for almost anything so that he got the whole of it in his own possession.

He paced the room in a nervous state for some time, vainly trying to invent a pretext by which the stranger would intrust the gold to him alone.

Finally he stopped in front of the Westerner and said:

"See here, sir; I am a responsible man. Suppose I give you a bond that I will carry out the tenor of the will: can't you trust me then?"

The stranger shook his head.

"I cannot see what good a bond will be to me when I am three thousand miles away, as I shall soon be. The only indemnity that you can offer, so far as I can see, is, in addition to the ten thousand five hundred which is coming to me, another ten thousand, which will be returned to you the moment I find that you have fulfilled your agreement."

"Oh, that is preposterous!" growled the gardener. "Ten thousand dollars in money?"

"Why not?"

"But I do not know you."

"True enough; but you will have the gold as security. What more do you want? By the way, I should have told you my name before this. It is Preston H. Bradish."

But Maynard was too anxious about the gold to pay much attention to the name, and presently asked:

"You say you have a sample of the gold in your bag?"

"So I have," replied Bradish. "I had forgotten all about it. Let me show it to you."

With that he opened the bag and took out a good-sized "brick" of gold and handed it to the gardener.

A peculiar thrill of joy ran through the latter when he felt the precious metal, which weighed about fourteen pounds, in his hands.

He smiled effusively, and, as he weighed it in his hand, said:

"Pretty heavy, ain't it?"

"It ought to be," rejoined Bradish.

"There is over two thousand six hundred dollars' worth of pure gold in that brick."

"I don't wonder you didn't want to bring it all up with you," chuckled the market-gardener. "This alone must have been a pretty good load."

"You are right. But hadn't we better go somewhere and have this tested, so that you may be sure it is pure gold?"

"That would be a good idea," replied Maynard, "and I know the very man."

"Is he far from here?"

"No, only a little way."

"Are you sure that he understands his business?"

"He ought to. He is a jeweler."

"He might be that, and still know very little about metals. However, we will go to him and see what he says."

It did not take the gardener long to get ready, it may be imagined, and the two left the house together.

As Maynard had said, the jeweler's place in question was only a short distance from the house, and they soon reached it.

The gardener took the brick from the satchel and handed it to the jeweler, with the request:

"Examine that, Zigler, and see what you think of it."

The jeweler, who was a wizened little German, took the golden brick, turned it over and handled it curiously, and then, looking up at the gardener, questioned:

"Were you git dat, Maynard?"

"Never mind where I got it," rejoined Maynard. "Tell me whether it is pure gold or not."

"Oh, I see," grinned the jeweler; "been buying cold bricks, eh? Petter vat you look a little oudt dat you don't vas got shwindled by dem fellers."

"I'll look out for that," assured the gardener. "What I want of you is to test that piece of gold and see whether it is pure or not, or else hand it back here and I'll take it somewhere else."

"Oh, yah! I examine it right away, Mister Maynard."

And the little jeweler set to work, first boring a hole in one place and then in another, and finally gathering all the particles and touching them with acid.

Several minutes were consumed in the test, and then he looked up with a grin.

"Well, what do you find?" growled the gardener.

"Bure cold," returned the German.

"What is the brick worth?" next inquired Maynard.

Zigler put the brick on the scales, and followed the action with a long whistle as he saw the scales go down.

"Mine gracious!" he ejaculated. "Dot brick vas wort, let me see," he pondered

"Dot brick vas wort two t'ousand six hundred and eighty-eight tollars, Mr. Maynard. Vere you get him?"

"What is your bill?" asked the other, by way of reply.

"Von tollar," grinned the jeweler, evidently adding a hundred per cent. to his bill because he had failed to satisfy his curiosity as to where the gardener had obtained the gold.

Maynard grumbled at the bill, but Bradish generously volunteered to pay it, and the heir allowed him to do it, after which they left the shop.

"Now let us go down and see the rest of it," suggested the gardener.

"You are satisfied with this one, are you?" questioned Bradish.

"More than satisfied," cried the other enthusiastically. How could I be otherwise after what the jeweler says about it?"

The men walked as far as the Kingsbridge station of the Rapid Transit Railroad, and were just in time to catch a down town train, which landed them, twenty minutes later, at Forty second street.

Bradish's hotel was but a little way from here, and they proceeded the rest of the way on foot.

When they were in Bradish's room and the door locked, the Westerner brought the remainder of the gold bricks for the gardener's inspection.

His eyes were dazzled at the sight, and he could hardly contain himself.

"This is the greatest sight I ever saw!" he declared as he gazed at the heap of gold piled upon the table. "And to think that it is all mine!"

"All yours?" exclaimed Bradish.

"Well, all except what you are to have, I mean."

"How about the heirs?" inquired Bradish, in evident surprise.

"Oh, of course, I've got to look out for them. Still, a portion of it is mine."

"Yes, a portion of it. But, hadn't we better take the rest of it to a goldsmith and have it tested?"

"No, it is not worth while. I'm willing to take your word for the rest, as the first one was all right."

"Better be sure."

"I'll risk it," cried the avaricious soil-tiller.

CHAPTER III

THE DEAL.

ALLOWING the gardener's enthusiasm to cool a little, the Westerner said:

"Well, as you won't take the gold to a jeweler to have it tested, we had better weigh it and see whether there is the full amount that I represented."

He took a pair of assayer's scales from their case and put them on the table.

He then explained that every ounce of gold represented sixteen dollars, after which the two men proceeded to weigh the precious metal, and compute the value.

At the conclusion of the work the Westerner observed:

"I want to start West in the morning, and don't believe I want to bother any more with the rest of the heirs. I believe you are an honest man, and I can trust you to see that they are properly treated. You have already given me your word that they should be, and I am willing to take it. Therefore, I won't claim the ten thousand dollars I spoke of as security, and will only take what belongs to me—the ten thousand five hundred dollars." The gardener was overcome with gratitude at this generous offer, and was ready for anything.

"It is very kind of you, sir," he said, "and I will show you that I am not insensible of your generosity."

Bradish was silent for a few moments, and then ventured modestly:

"There is but one thing I would ask in return for what you term my generosity."

"What is that?"

"I don't care to carry all this heavy bullion with me on my travels, and I will be obliged to you if you will give me paper for my share. That I can easily carry on my person, you see."

The gardener considered for a moment, meanwhile gazing fondly at the pile of gold, and then replied:

"Why, certainly. But you will have to wait until morning for it, as all my money is in the bank."

"Oh, that won't do me. I have got to get away early in the morning, so must have the money to-night."

Maynard thought he had the Westerner in a tight place and determined to be as inflexible as stone.

"I can't help it," he said indifferently. "I can't get the money to-night, and I don't see what you are going to do about it."

"I'll tell you very soon what I will do about it," answered the other somewhat peremptorily.

"What is that?"

"I won't allow you to take an ounce of this ore away until I get the money, and if I have to wait till morning, I'll wait longer, and look up the other heirs. Come to think of it, I guess that will be the better plan, anyway. My conscience won't be easy otherwise."

This had the desired effect, and the other hastened to interpose:

"Oh, if it is so really urgent, I guess I can make the raise to-night. You wait here for me, and I'll see what I can do among my neighbors."

With that, he hastened away.

For two hours Bradish waited for his return; then Maynard came, and with him two porters, whom he had brought to help him with the metal.

He also brought the cash, which he laid before the Westerner with a triumphant air.

"There you are, sir!" he cried enthusiastically. "Count it and see if it is right. I tell you, if there is anybody in this town who can raise money on short notice, it is I!"

Bradish carefully counted over the bills and found the amount to be correct—ten thousand and five hundred dollars.

"It is all right," he remarked calmly, folding up the bills and putting them into his pocket. "You may take the gold as soon as you like."

Maynard was not long in doing so, and was soon off with the bullion.

He spent another sleepless night, weighing and reweighing and gloating over his golden acquisition, and the next morning neglected his work for the same reason.

During the forenoon he could not resist the temptation of paying another visit to the little jeweler with two more of his golden bricks, which he laid down in front of the astonished German with a triumphant gesture and the command:

"There, Zigler, examine those two and see what you make of them, and also give their money value."

The jeweler grinned as he took up the first brick and turned it over and over for inspection.

Maynard thought there was the least bit of irony to his smile as he did so, but attributed it to the curt manner in which he had treated the jeweler the night before.

Finally the little German bored a few holes in the brick, and his smile waxed more ironical.

He then applied the acid to the particles which he had extracted, and shook his head.

Then Maynard was sure there was something in the smile.

"What is it?" he demanded irritably.

"Dis brick?" grinned the jeweler.

"Yes."

"Prass," he replied.

"Nonsense!" cried Maynard, growing alarmed. "Try the other one."

The jeweler did so, and declared it to also be brass.

"I told you it vas petter you look out by dem shwindlers," chuckled Zigler. "I told you you vas git bit, hey?"

"And I tell you now that you don't know what you are talking about!" roared the gardener. "Why, that is the same brick you tested last night, and said it was gold."

"Oh, no, mine frient," protested the jeweler. "Dot von vas cold, goot medal, but dis von vas prass, not wort one tollar!"

Maynard stayed to hear no more.

Gathering up his bricks he rushed from the shop.

Five minutes later he was in another shop having the bricks tested, and with the same

result. Still not satisfied, he visited two or three others, but in the end he was compelled to believe what the first one had told him, that his gold bricks were spurious.

He then carried, one by one, the remainder of the bricks to various jewelers, but only to learn that they were all alike.

He was sorely puzzled.

He was confident—in fact, positive, the first one was genuine, and what puzzled him most was what had become of it.

He had carried the sachel containing it himself, and felt sure that it had never gone out of his sight, but the sad truth finally dawned upon him that he had been done for, and that the melancholy story as related by the sad-eyed stranger was probably all a hoax.

A less cunning man would have felt the defeat less forcibly, but Earnest Maynard, who prided himself upon his keenness, to be taken in so neatly was too much for him.

He spent several hours in gloomy meditation, and finally made a trip to the hotel where he had left the stranger the previous night; but, as he might have expected, the stranger was gone—had left the night before, in fact.

The gardener then did what he should have done in the first place—sought the police and placed the case before them.

Inspector Williams, to whom he went, heard the case through, and, unable to repress a smile at the man's simplicity, observed:

"I'm afraid you have come a little late, my friend. That sharper is doubtless many miles away ere this. However, we will do all we can for you, and if the fellow is still in the city, the detective whom I shall detail on the case will surely run him down."

Maynard thanked the inspector and left the office.

Half an hour later, in response to a call upon the telephone, Thad Burr, the great Special, entered.

"Sit down, Thad," requested Williams. "I've got a peculiar case for you—so peculiar in fact, that I do not believe any other detective in the city could touch it."

"Thanks, inspector, for the compliment!" returned Thad, modestly; "but, how about myself?"

"Why, if there is a possibility of success, you will succeed; but to tell the truth, I doubt very much whether anybody can."

"How so?"

"In my opinion the game has flown."

The inspector then went on to relate the story of the slick gold brick game, at the conclusion of which the detective shook his head.

"Tough case," he observed. "As you remark, there is not more than one chance in a hundred of success, but I am willing to work upon the one chance, if you say so."

"Yes, go ahead, Thad, and do the best you can with it. There is a fighting chance that the fellow belongs to the city, in which case you will run him down; but he is evidently a keen one."

"There is one thing that makes me suspect he belongs out of town."

"What is that, Thad?"

"He worked alone. New York crooks usually work in pairs or groups. Yet the fellow may have had his pals, in this game."

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAGEDY ON THE BRIDGE.

It was toward night when Burr left the inspector's office. He took an up-town train as far as Forty-second street, where he changed to the Rapid Transit for Kingsbridge, and a few minutes later arrived at the house of Earnest Maynard.

He found that gentleman in a state of depression over the loss of his money, and willing to do anything to get it back.

After securing a minute description of his man, Thad asked:

"Have you any clue by which you could guess where he went from here?"

"None whatever," returned the gardener dismally. "He said he lived in the West, and that he was going there, but it never occurred to me to ask him what part of the West he was going to."

"And you are not even sure that he went West at all, eh?"

"No, sir, although I have no doubt he did."

"Did the fellow talk or act like a Western man?"

"I can't say that he did; but, the fact is, I did not think of that, at the time. I was so overcome at the sight of the gold that I was blinded to everything else."

"You did not notice that he spoke with the drawl peculiar to the Westerner?"

"I don't believe he did, now that you speak of it, although it did not occur to me at the time."

"Just as I thought," mused the detective. "He is most likely an Eastern crook, and I do not imagine it will be necessary to look outside of the city limits very far to find my man."

It was some time after dark when the detective left the house, and the cold, penetrating rain which had been falling all afternoon had turned to snow. Indeed, it had been snowing for a long time and several inches already lay on the ground.

Thad pulled the collar of his coat up about his ears and hurried on toward the station, paying very little attention to anything that went on about him.

But, when within a hundred yards of the station, his attention was attracted by the strange actions of a woman.

She was very tall and closely veiled, and appeared to be deeply absorbed in watching two men who stood a short distance away from her, engaged in conversation.

The woman was partially concealed by the shadow of a building, and craned her neck to keep her eye on the two men, who were on the next corner.

There was not much in the circumstance, except that the woman appeared to be in a terribly nervous state.

At one moment she would start out as if she intended to approach the two on the corner, but would as suddenly dodge back as if afraid to carry out her design.

This led the detective to scrutinize the men closely; and then he saw, to his surprise, that one of them almost, if not exactly, suited the description of the gold brick swindler which had been furnished him by Maynard!

The fellow was tall and powerfully-built, wore a broad-brimmed hat and a long ulster with a cape to it. The other man was rather below medium size and dressed in an ordinary suit and derby hat.

Both men appeared to be greatly excited, and from their wild gestures it was evident that they were having a dispute about something, although from where the detective stood he could hear nothing of what was being said.

There was something so interesting about the scene that shrewd Thad Burr was prone to stop in a place where he was not likely to be noticed and watch the three parties.

But the discussion or altercation did not last long after the detective took his stand, for soon the two men walked on together at a rapid pace, while the tall woman quickly left her hiding-place and stole along after them, apparently taking great pains to avoid being seen by those she followed.

Burr's curiosity now was thoroughly aroused.

The appearance of the tall man, which tallied so nearly with the description of Bradish, was sufficient of itself to have made him desirous of seeing more of the fellow and ascertaining who and what he was.

He too, therefore, took up the trail, shadowing the shadower, and paying but little attention to the men, for he knew that the woman would keep them in sight, and all that was necessary for him to do was to watch her.

Like a cat after a mouse, she stole along with a step so stealthy and light, that, although Thad was but a few feet behind her, he could not hear the slightest sound, while she kept turning her head from side to side, as if trying to catch what they were saying.

Thus several blocks were traversed, and at length they came to High Bridge, which crosses the Harlem River at this point, and, dark and stormy as it was, the men started over it.

There was less chance for concealment here, which the woman evidently realized, for she dropped further behind, and kept as close to

the railing as possible to prevent observation.

About the middle of the bridge the men stopped, and appeared to be disputing whether they should go on or return.

At this juncture the woman squatted close to the railing so that she was completely hidden by the shadow of the stone parapet.

Thad approached to within a few feet of her, but she was too intently absorbed in the contemplation of the two men to notice him.

Several minutes passed thus; then the tall man was seen to walk away and leave the other, who remained standing on the bridge.

At this point the woman arose from her crouching posture and craned her neck to see where the tall man had gone.

When she was satisfied, as it seemed, that he was gone for good, she walked on briskly and soon came up to the smaller man.

The two at once engaged in an animated conversation, and Thad walked on until he had approached within earshot of them, which he succeeded in doing without attracting their attention.

Seeing that he had not been noticed, he followed the woman's example of squatting down in the shadow of the parapet.

Here he could overhear what was passing between them.

"You're a fool, Silas Folger!" were the first words that reached the acute detective's ears. "Why didn't you go with him?"

"What was the use?" questioned the man, timidly. "He'll come back again."

"Don't you believe it! He will never come back."

"Why not?"

"There is too much at stake."

Nevertheless, he knows that he can never escape me. He knows that one word from me would ruin everything, and that I am liable to speak that word the moment he refuses to divvy."

"Little good it will do you to peach when he is a thousand miles away, which he is liable to be before you know what has become of him; but, what was the idea of stopping here?"

"He is to bring it to me here."

"And you believe he will?"

"I haven't any doubt of it."

"Then you are more of a fool than I thought for! It was a mere subterfuge to get away from you, and he'll never show his face again, take my word for it. Why didn't you go with him and stay with him until you got your share?"

"There was too much risk, my dear."

"Risk of what?"

"Of being seen with him."

"You two have often been seen together before, why not now?"

The man did not reply immediately, but turned his head and looked off in the direction the tall man had gone.

"I know we have," he finally said, "but it is different now, since this thing happened."

"I don't understand," interjected the woman with a puzzled tone.

"Why, you don't suppose he has done this job without some one seeing him, do you?"

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, don't you see, if the matter has been reported to the police, there will be some detective on his track by this time who is liable to nab him at any moment, and it wouldn't be good policy to be in his company at such a time."

"What did he say about your not being there to help him out?"

"He didn't like it, of course, but he knew that it was not my fault."

"Does he find no objection to dividing under the circumstances, Si?" queried the woman, coming closer to him.

"He did find a good deal of objection, but he has no business to, under the agreement."

"Mark my words, that was his reason for going off and leaving you here. If he had intended to do the right thing he would have had the money with him when you met him to-night."

"He might do such a thing if he did not realize the hold I have on him. But, knowing that—"

Here he paused suddenly, cast a hasty

glance toward the end of the bridge whence the tall man had gone, and then, giving the woman a hasty push, exclaimed in a scared voice:

"Get out of sight, quick! Here he comes now!"

The woman dodged to the far side of the great bridge like a flash, and crouched down in the deep shadow there.

The man assumed an unconcerned air, and even began to whistle and stamp about as if to keep his feet warm.

Two minutes later the tall man came up with him.

Thad could see that there was a scowl on his face, and his first words were:

"Who was here just now?"

"No one," replied the other indifferently.

"But I know there was some one!" growled the tall fellow. "Do you imagine I am blind?"

The smaller man laughed carelessly.

"You must be," he returned, "if you say you saw any one here. Or perhaps you see double?"

"This is no time for jesting, Silas Folger! I tell you I saw some one here, and it is no use for you to try to deceive me!"

"And I tell you that you are mistaken!" cried the other, losing his temper.

"Look here, sir! If you try to play any games on me, you will pay for it!"

"Don't dare to insinuate that I would do such a thing, Casper Murdoch!" hissed the other savagely, "or I'll—"

As he uttered the words he made a stride toward the big man, but the next instant, uttering a cry of pain, he dropped face down upon the bridge roadway.

In another second the woman stood before the tall man, and, raising her veil so that he could see her face, she hissed:

"You see, there was a witness to that deed!"

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTIC BROTHERHOOD.

As the mysterious woman faced the tall man, the light from the bridge lamp near by fell full on his face, and the now keenly wide-awake detective had a good view of it.

It was dark and forbidding, but at sight of the woman it became deadly pale.

The man ground his teeth and clinched his fists, showing that he either dreaded or feared the woman before him as he might have done a serpent.

"Miranda!" he gasped. "What are you doing here?"

"I am here," replied the woman, "to witness the crime which you have just committed, and to see that you are brought to justice for it."

"You have witnessed what passed, then?" repeated the man, venomously.

"I have," she replied, incisively.

"Then you have followed us?"

"Yes."

"For what purpose?"

"To see that you did him justice."

"And you have seen me do him justice."

"Justice? I saw you strike him down!"

"What I did was in self-defense—you saw that."

"I saw nothing of the kind," persisted the woman. "I only saw that you were trying to swindle him out of his just dues, and because he stood out for his rights, you struck him down like a dog!"

"You are wrong, Miranda, upon my soul you are," pleaded the big ruffian humbly. "He made at me with the intention of killing me; I drew my knife only in self-defense, and he literally ran the blade into his own body."

"You lie! you villain of villains!" screamed the woman. "You killed him in cold blood, and I shall have you brought to justice for it, if it is the last act of my life!"

"Then it will be the last act of your life!" the assassin retorted with vengeful mien. "The threat and not the act, shall be your last act."

And with the words he made a lunge at her with the blade still red with the blood of the man who lay at his feet.

But the woman was on the alert for just such an act of treachery, and sprang so

quickly aside that the knife missed her wholly.

This only had the effect of increasing the brutal villain's fury, and, turning, he made at her a second time.

But he never reached her: the next instant the detective stood before him, revolver leveled.

"Another step, and you are a dead man!"

The assassin shrunk back, terrified and foiled.

"Who are you?" he faltered, in a tremulous voice.

"It does not matter. You are my prisoner!" responded Burr, coolly. "Up with your hands!"

The man took another step backward, and the detective was about to advance upon him, when a sharp blow on the back of Burr's head which had been dealt from behind, stunned him so that for a moment he grew blind and dizzy, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he prevented himself from falling to the roadway.

For over a minute he was in a bewildered state of mind and half oblivious to what passed about him.

With a supreme effort he tottered to the stone parapet and leaned against it for support.

There he stood for more than a minute longer before he could collect his senses, and as his senses came back to him, he looked about, still in a half-dazed way, and the first thing that impressed him was the fact that the woman and man had both disappeared!

He could not realize how they could have vanished so quickly, and then it occurred to him that he must have been unconscious a considerable time.

He gazed along the bridge in both directions; not a soul was to be seen anywhere!

Then he thought of the murdered man.

He must see that he was removed, and knew that he must go some distance to find a policeman or anybody else, that stormy night.

He thought he had better take a look at the body and see if the man was really dead.

He cast his eye about him accordingly, but, what was his astonishment to find no sign of the body!

A few spots of blood which stained the pure snow attested the fact that the body had been there, and, to all appearances, a murder had been committed, but the body itself had vanished as completely as the tall man and the mysterious woman.

How had it all come about?

He knew now that he must have been worse stunned than he had at first imagined, and that he must have been unconscious a long time for all this to have happened.

Then he thought of the blow he had received, and wondered who had inflicted it.

He could not imagine that it had been the woman, and yet, somehow, he could not consider the incident without associating her with it, and her tall form and dark face loomed before his imagination like some grim specter.

The detective examined the spot where he had seen the man lying once more to make sure that he had not been mistaken.

No, there was the imprint in the snow of the outstretched body, and there was also the spot of blood, and about it were numerous footprints, indicating that there had been a good deal of walking about the fallen man; and then he made another discovery.

As he gazed at the trodden snow and his eyes grew accustomed to the shifting wind-blown light, he espied something lying in the roadway, and picked it up.

It proved to be a sheet of writing-paper, folded in a form to fit an envelope.

Thad opened it and tried to read it, but the light was too dim for that, so he gave it up and put the note into his pocket.

He then continued his course over the bridge.

Not till then did he realize that his feet were nearly frozen from standing in the snow, and he increased his pace in order to warm them.

A few minutes' brisk walk sufficed to bring him to the station, where he took the train for down town.

As soon as he was seated in the car he took out the letter and perused it.

He had not read a half dozen lines before he saw that it had belonged to the party he had seen on the bridge, and only served to intensify the mystery.

It read as follows:

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:—

"An injury to one is the concern of all. Do not, therefore, dare to molest one of us, unless you desire to incur the wrath of every one, be you a victim of our dealings or an officer of the law, for you cannot hope to escape the vengeance of

"THE MYSTIC BROTHERHOOD."

This appeared to explain how he had come to be attacked from behind in the mysterious manner in which he was; but, the main mystery was—who were these "mystic brothers," and how had any member of them managed to steal upon him without observation?

And in this connection his mind again recurred to the woman.

Was it possible that she had been the one to assault him? And, if so, why had she done so, when he was endeavoring to protect her from the assault of the intended murderer?

It did not seem possible that it could have been she, after all, but that left the mystery of how she had come to disappear so suddenly, no less than the assault upon himself, unsolved.

He was in this perplexed state of mind when he reached the Forty-second street station.

Had he been less abstracted, he would have doubtless noticed an individual in the train, not many seats away from him, who appeared to take the deepest interest in the detective and his movements.

This person had the appearance of a Western man, judging from his dress and general make-up.

His hair and beard were long, straggling and gray. His clothing was rather shabby and loose-fitting, and he wore a slouch hat peculiar to that worn by a "granger," and he carried a heavy walking-stick with an immense crook at the end.

So deeply interested did he appear to be, that, when the detective left the train, the queer-looking individual followed close upon his heels and kept him in sight until Thad took a cab for home.

Even then the strange person did not relax his vigilance, but went to the trouble of engaging another cab, instructing the driver to keep in sight the one in which Thad had taken passage.

All this time the detective was oblivious to the fact that he was thus being shadowed, and never dreamed of anything of the kind until he had alighted from his cab and was about to enter his house in Thirty-fourth street, when the appearance of the cab which had pulled up not twenty yards behind him, attracted his attention, and he paused to look at it.

"There's somethin' queer about that chap," observed Thad's driver. "He's follied us all the way from the station."

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERIOUS VISITOR.

As soon as his own cab had driven away, Thad concealed himself in the shadow near his house to watch the occupant of the other vehicle, who, as soon as he thought the detective was gone, had his cab driven up in front of the dwelling where he was standing.

The queer-looking individual then proceeded to alight and made toward the house.

When Thad saw that he intended coming in, he slipped into the area and entered his house in that way.

By hurrying up-stairs he was in time to meet the stranger just as the servant opened the door to him.

The hall was too dark for the stranger to see him, however, and the detective slipped back into his private office.

Not knowing whether he was in or not, the servant came back to see, and when she found her master in, hurried back to usher in the new-comer.

A moment later the queer individual entered the detective's presence.

"This is Mr. Burr, I believe?" began the

stranger, with an unmistakable Western drawl.

"It is," replied the detective. "Whomay I have the honor of meeting?"

"My name is Maynard," rejoined the other, "and I have come to see you relative to an important piece of business which I believe you are interested in."

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Maynard," said Thad, grasping his hand. "This isn't the father of—"

"Yes," interrupted the stranger, "I am the old Californian who is dead, and whose wealth the slick stranger came on here to settle on my heirs."

Thad was dumfounded.

This was a turn of affairs, sure enough—one he had not looked for, and he was too greatly overcome with surprise to speak for some moments.

At length he proceeded to business.

"Pray, be seated, sir. You interest me greatly."

The old man sunk into a chair facing the detective, but did not remove his great slouch hat, and, leaning his chin on his cane, fixed a pair of extremely keen and penetrating black eyes upon him.

"As I was saying," he went on, "I am the old man who is supposed to be dead, and whose wealth Mr. Bradish, I think he called himself, proposed to settle on my heirs, and, learning that you were working on the case, I thought it just as well to come and see you."

"That was right, sir," returned Thad; "but, first tell me how you discovered that the trick had been played and how you knew I was working on the case."

"Well, to answer the last question first, as soon as I heard that a stranger had gone to my son, representing himself as my former friend and my present executor, I dropped into Police Headquarters to see about it, and they sent me to you. I then came here and, finding you away from home, I thought you might be out to my son's, so started for there. But, just as I got off the train I saw you about to take the other train back, and from the description I had had of you, I guessed it was you, and took the same train."

"How was it you did not address yourself to me in the train?"

"I wasn't certain enough that it was you, and thought I would wait and see if you came here, which I knew to be your house."

"Then you shadowed me all the way from Kingsbridge?"

"I did."

"Well, tell me how you discovered that this swindler had passed himself off on your son as your friend and executor and perpetrated the gold brick game on him?"

"That is very simple. I came on here to look up my family, as I had made enough money to do me the rest of my life and to spare them some, and just arrived in the city yesterday and put up at a hotel. Then, what was my astonishment to read in the papers that a stranger had called upon my son representing himself as my former friend and telling him that I was dead."

"Oh, you saw it in the papers, did you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And knew at once that it was your case?"

"Yes, how could I help it? The names were all right."

"That is true. But, how do you imagine this stranger knew anything about you or your business?"

"That's what puzzles me. I can't imagine how he found it out. But he seemed to know what he was talking about."

"You read a description of the swindler, of course?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did the description recall any one whom you had ever met out in the mines or elsewhere, who would have been likely to have known all about your private life and affairs?"

"I can't think of any one, and yet it might fit any one of half-a-dozen men whom I have met at various times."

"But you cannot fix upon any one in particular?"

"No, sir."

"Was the name no assistance to you in this respect?"

"No, sir. I don't remember to have ever

met a man named Bradish that suited that description. But of course that goes for nothing, as every other man you meet in the mountains is sailing under false colors."

"That is, goes by a fictitious name, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

The detective reflected a moment, and the scene on the bridge and what he had heard came vividly before him.

He recalled the name he had heard the woman apply to the tall man, and something told him that this might possibly be the real name of the wretch, as crooks, when alone, are in the habit of dropping the formalities which they affect during business hours.

His face brightened with the thought, and he asked:

"Perhaps you might have known a person by the name of Casper Murdoch at some time or other?"

"Casper Murdoch?" repeated the old man, knitting his brows with deep thought, and then fell into a brown study from which he did not emerge for some minutes.

"Casper Murdoch?" he muttered to himself over and over again. "Where have I heard that name? It is as familiar to me as my own, and yet, for the life of me I cannot just recall where or when I have heard it. Oh, by George! I have it!" he finally exclaimed. "Sure enough, I know now! How could I ever have forgotten that name for a single instant? It is a name I have reason to remember above all others. To be sure! Casper Murdoch. He's the fellow!"

"You knew him, then?"

"I should say I did!"

"In the mountains?"

"No, siree! Right here in New York, nearly forty years ago. Why, we were schoolmates, and afterward the warmest of friends; then we courted the same girl, and I married her, and from that out we were the worst of friends."

"Did he ever show any indications of craving revenge?"

"Great Scott! I guess he did! Why, he did every mortal thing he could against me, and it was principally through him that I failed in business and was driven to the diggings to recover my lost wealth and health, which had also suffered from worry."

"Did you ever hear of him after going West?"

"Never."

"And you do not know whether he followed you out there or not?"

"No, I don't; but I do know that there was a snake in the grass somewhere, but I could never trace it. I shouldn't wonder now, if he was the snake, and this was another one of his tricks."

"You say you have a good deal of wealth which you made in the mines, Mr. Maynard?"

"About two hundred thousand dollars," replied the old man, with a show of pride.

"There is where this fellow made one mistake, anyway. He represented your wealth as being no more than fifty thousand."

"It was impossible that he should have known any better, for you are the first man I ever told about the amount."

"I can see now that he might have been nothing more than a New York bunco man," mused the detective. "It was easy enough for him to learn the little he pretended to know about your history in the mines, which, pieced out with what he learned from your son, made a very plausible story. Have you had any talk with any strangers about your business in the city, or revealed to them who you were?"

The old man reflected.

"N—no," he mused, finally. "That is—let me see. Come to think of it, I met a woman on the train coming from Chicago. We got into conversation, somehow. I think she asked me a question about the trains or something, and we then got to talking, and she told me she lived here in the city, and I asked her if she knew any of the Maynards. She said she did, and I made some inquiries, and in the course of the conversation I think I told her that I was from the West, and was coming on to settle some property on my family."

Thad's heart leaped with an inspiration!

This looked very much like a clue, and his mind at once reverted to the woman he had seen on the bridge!

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST CLUE.

THE detective was so enthusiastic at the discovery of what he believed to be a genuine clue, that he could hardly wait until the old man had finished speaking before he interjected the question:

"What was the woman like?"

"I don't know that I can describe her," returned the old man, reflectively. "Although I would know her if I should meet her anywhere in Christendom."

"Was she tall?"

"Yes, very tall!" he cried, enthusiastically.

"And dark?"

"Rather, I should say."

"About how old a woman?"

"In the neighborhood of forty, I should think."

"Was her voice heavy and masculine?"

"Yes, yes! Almost like that of a man. In fact, a good many men would appear more manly if they had her voice."

"That is the woman, I'll bet a cool thousand!" ejaculated the detective, enthusiastically. "Did you learn her name?"

"Let me see: I believe she did tell me her name, though I can't just recall it now."

"Her first name wasn't anything like Miranda, was it?"

"By Jingo! you've hit it. It was Miranda, and come to think of it, her last name was Hoffman. Miranda Hoffman was her name, sure enough! Why, you must know her!"

"No, not exactly, although I have seen a woman of that description under such peculiar circumstances that I am inclined to believe she was the same you met on the train, and I have not the least doubt but the information gleaned from you was used in carrying out the swindling scheme. Did she give you her address or any clue by which you might discover where she lives in the city?"

"Yes, she gave me her address. Let me see," mused the old man. "I think I have it here," he went on, fumbling in his pocket. "Yes, here it is."

And he pulled out a slip of paper with a name and address written on it.

Sure enough, it was "Miranda H. Hoffman," and the address was West Fifty-seventh street, not far from Sixth avenue.

But the fact did not affect Thad, for he had no faith in the address being the correct one.

However, he made a copy of it in his notebook, as it was barely possible that the woman might live there, or that somebody at the address might know something about her.

"Have you seen your son yet?" asked the detective, after a long silence.

"Not yet," was the other's reply. "I had started out there when I saw you, as I told you, but I was so anxious to see and speak to you about this matter that I could not think of going on then. I shall go out in the morning."

"The swindlers did not get anything out of you, did they?"

"Not a cent. I'm too sharp for that."

"That is what your son thought, but they got the best of him, after all."

"That was because he wanted to get something for nothing, don't you see?" rejoined the old man, smiling.

"Which is true, probably. That is the way most men happen to be taken in. If they were strictly honest themselves, they would not be likely to bite at such bait. But knowing that you had so much money with you, it is a wonder that they did not at least try to work their game on you. You had the money all in gold, I presume?"

"Every ounce of it."

"In bricks, or coin?"

"In bricks."

"And it was in the baggage-car, of course?"

"No, siree! I'm not such a fool as to trust all that amount of money to the Express Company."

"Where did you have it?"

"Right along with me."

"Where?"

"In a box, in the car with me. Why, it took two men to put it in, and they made an awful kick because I had it put in the sec-

tion, but I had the whole section in the car, and they couldn't say much."

"Where is the gold now?"

"In my room, at the hotel."

"Don't you think that a little risky, to have so much wealth in your room at the hotel?"

"Not a bit of it. Nobody knows what's in the box but myself."

"But you are probably aware that the chambermaid of the hotel has a key to your room?"

"Has she?"

And the old man sprung to his feet and his face assumed a terrified expression.

"That's true, and you can never tell what villain may stand in with these chambermaids. Some of them make a regular business of finding out what there is of value in guests' rooms and informing pals on the outside."

"In that case, I guess I'll be going," cried the old man, growing momentarily more nervous.

"What hotel are you stopping at?"

"It's in Forty-second street."

"Great Scott!" and the detective turned pale at the thought. "Not the one near the Grand Central Depot?"

"Yes, it is near there."

It was now the detective's turn to spring up.

"My dear sir," he cried, "you can't get back there too quickly, then."

"Why?" gasped the old man.

"That is the very hotel at which the gold brick swindler was stopping!"

"Great Caesar!"

And the old man bolted out of the house without as much as stopping to take his leave.

Curious to know the result of this piece of carelessness, Thad lost no time in hurrying from the house and following the old fellow, whom he reached the street in time to see hastening away in the distance on foot.

The old man did not walk, or rather run—for he was in a run when Thad reached the street—for at the first corner he took a cab and dashed away in that.

Thad was not in so much of a hurry, although it was now after midnight, and walked as far as Broadway, where he boarded an up-town car which ran to the Grand Central Depot.

He reached the hotel just in time to see the old Westerner come tearing back into the office having evidently been to his room, white and agitated.

"I've been robbed!" he gasped, rushing up to the clerk's desk.

"What?" growled the sleepy night-clerk.

"I've been robbed!" shrieked the old man in desperation.

"Robbed of what?" muttered the clerk still drowsily.

"My gold!" cried the old chap. "Robbed of all my gold! What shall I do?"

"Where was your gold?" questioned the clerk, beginning to take a faint interest in the matter.

"In my room—No. 145, on the fourth floor!"

"How much was there?"

"Two hundred thousand dollars!"

The clerk was wide awake now.

He straightened up and rubbed his eyes.

"Do you mean to tell me that you had as much as that in your room?" he inquired coldly.

"Yes, and it's gone! Oh, what shall I do?"

"Don't know," whined the clerk, dropping back into an easy attitude again. "No business to have valuables in your room. Rules of the house against it. Not responsible for valuables unless left at office and put in safe."

And the clerk coldly pointed to a notice over his head which read to that effect.

The old man turned away in despair, and met the detective.

"Oh, you here?" he cried. "Just as you predicted. I've been robbed! Box and all gone! What am I to do? It was all the wealth I had in the world!"

"I am very sorry for you, sir," rejoined Thad sympathetically. "But it is no more than I expected. You should have either taken it to a bank or left it with the hotel—make some inquiries."

He called the clerk, and after

a series of interrogations, induced that functionary to make an investigation, which resulted in the discovery of an order, apparently written in the old man's hand, requesting the hotel-keeper to deliver to bearer a certain box which he (the writer) had in his room.

"This is about as clever a game as the gold-brick game," observed the detective, after examining the forged order.

The old man groaned.

"I'll never see my gold again!" he muttered piteously.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE SCENT.

THERE was nothing about the note to indicate who the real writer was, and there was no other clue by which to trace the thief or thieves, beyond the fact that a rough-looking porter had brought the note and taken away the box of bullion.

No one about the hotel could give a clear enough description of the porter to serve as a clue for the detective to work upon, and he was as much in the dark in the matter as he had been with regard to the perpetrators of the gold-brick swindle.

But there was one point he was reasonably sure of, and that was that the same person or gang was responsible for both transactions, and he believed that when one was caught he would have the other.

Without any hope that it would be of any service to him, Thad took charge of the forged order for the box, and, after consoling the old man as well as he could under the discouraging circumstances, bade him good night, put the paper into his pocket and went home.

When he reached home, Burr took out the slip of paper and proceeded to examine it.

For a long time there appeared to be nothing peculiar or significant about it.

It was written on a strip of white ruled paper which had evidently been torn off of a pad of writing paper.

It was plain to be seen that the writing was disguised, and the fact that it was made to slightly resemble that of the old man showed that the writer was acquainted with the Westerner's chirography.

After a long and careful examination, however, the detective made one very small and apparently insignificant discovery.

The ink used was a violet of a peculiar shade—a shade very rarely seen. This might or might not lead to anything, but, on still closer examination, he made another discovery. This was the scarcely visible trace of four letters, which had evidently been left there by a blotter still wet from blotting some other bit of writing!

The letters were therefore reversed, and consisted of "Mad H," only backward, and it did not take Thad long to supply the missing letters and make "Madison House" out of it.

This was at least a clue, he mused, and it encouraged him to examine the paper still further, which resulted in a third discovery.

This was so vague and trifling in appearance that not one person in ten thousand would have noticed it, and that one would have, probably, attached no significance to it.

It consisted simply of the scarcely visible impression of a seal ring, which had been made in folding the sheet.

But there was a peculiarity about the design on the seal which might serve a purpose.

It was a coiled serpent with prominent eyes, which in the ring were probably stones of some description.

The impression was so vague that ten thousand people would have examined the paper without discovering it, but it had not escaped the detective's keen eyes, and he proposed to make the most of it.

It was too late to go anywhere or make any move that night, he thought, but one consideration was sufficient to cause him to pay a visit to the Madison House before sleeping that night.

The thought that the blotter might still be in the reading room, and that it might be destroyed before morning, induced this, and he was soon in the street again.

A cross-town car took him to Broadway and Twenty-second street, which only left him a couple of blocks to walk to Madison avenue, to the hotel.

The reading-room was closed and dark, but the night-clerk was an acquaintance, and at the detective's request, the room was lighted up and he was allowed to enter.

"What's in the wind now, Mr. Burr?" inquired the clerk curiously. "There's something on the tapis, I'll warrant."

"Yes, there is," admitted Thad. "I am on one of those cases where a single straw, which indicates which way the wind blows, is worth a mint of gold."

"What do you expect to find here?"

"A blotter," answered the detective simply.

"You'll find plenty of them here," laughed the clerk.

"No doubt, but the point is to find the right one. That is what I am after. A certain blotter which has been used, is worth more to me now than a wagon-load of new ones."

"Well, see if you can find it there," answered the clerk, pointing to the numerous writing-tables used by the guests. After which he returned to the office and left Thad to pursue his search.

Burr began his search for the evidence, and almost the first thing he encountered gave him a decided set-back.

This was the discovery that the ink used in the place was black instead of violet.

Still, he did not despair, and went on with his investigation, taking up and examining every one of the hundreds of blotters scattered about over the tables.

It was a long and tedious task, that was not finally accomplished until the end of an hour but only with the result of finding nothing of importance.

There was not a blotter in the place stained with violet ink, and he was compelled to abandon the task with the humiliating consciousness of failure, and he returned to the office in a less hopeful frame of mind than he had left it.

"Well, what luck?" inquired the clerk.

"Poor—very poor, rejoined Thad. "I find nothing that throws any light on the subject of what I am investigating."

"What do you want to find?" asked the clerk, whose curiosity was at fever-heat by this time.

Thad took the note from his pocket and, pointing out the nearly invisible impression, explained its possible significance.

"You see, I was downed on the first go-off," observed Thad, "when I saw that you didn't use violet ink in the reading-room, but I was still hopeful that I might run across the blotter, and it might turn out that the writer had used his own ink."

The clerk took the forged order and, after examining it for some time, remarked:

"If I am not mightily mistaken, that was written with a fountain-pen, so that the color of the ink would give you no clue, unless you chanced to run onto some chap with a fountain-pen with purple ink in it. But what made you think that the blot on the sheet stood for Madison House?"

"Which I may answer by asking what else could be made out of it?" replied the detective.

"Yes, it might stand for a good many things."

"It might, and doubtless does, but what, for instance?"

"Well, there is Madison Hotel, for instance, a house down on Madison street. It is more likely to be there anyway, inasmuch as your customer is a crook."

"I don't know so well about that. This you must remember, is a high-toned crook, and likely to stop at one of the best hotels in the city. Still, I will avail myself of your suggestion, and am much obliged to you for it."

"Don't mention it; but you are wrong in supposing that your high-toned crook is only to be found at the best hotels. He might stop at such a place, and very likely would, but those fellows generally have a fence in a less reputable place—a place where he could take a cage of lions or coin press into his room without attracting any special notice; whereas, in a first-class hotel an account is taken of all such matters."

"I guess you are right about that, and I shall lose no time in visiting this place."

"It will hardly be worth your while to go there to-night, as a place of that kind is not apt to change its blotters for a day or two or maybe a week at a time, and there will be nobody about but the night watchman at this time in the morning."

"That is true," rejoined Thad, consulting his watch. "It is now a quarter-past two. I'll wait till morning."

Burr returned home, but early the following forenoon he visited the hotel indicated by the clerk. He found it to be, evidently, one of those unsavory hostleries on the East Side, which are often the resort of the lowest, and in many cases the most vicious, members of society.

He made his wishes known to the clerk, who, after eying him with a good deal of aversion, granted a dogged permission for him to look through what he was pleased to call "de readin'-rume."

As the clerk of the Madison House had suggested, Thad found the blotters in an advanced stage of dilapidation, looking as if they had been used for a century, instead of a week or so.

Here, too, black was the prevailing color of the ink, but, after a long and tedious search, he discovered one with a few traces of violet ink upon it. His hopes were raised, and he set to examining the find with more minuteness.

And he was rewarded for his work by finding, not the trace which had left its mark on the forged order, but the faint, yet not indistinct impression of the order itself!

He was wild with enthusiasm, and rushed out to the clerk to make inquiries.

"Has there been a strong, iron-bound box brought here within a day or two?" he inquired.

"Say, dere might be a dozen boxes, fer all I know," growled the clerk, with a dogged leer at the detective.

CHAPTER IX.

A CHINESE WITNESS.

THIS was a decided set-back for the investigator; but, although he realized that he had a "tough one" to deal with, he determined to gain his point if he had to fight for it.

"The particular box I have reference to," he pursued, assuming a stern air, "must have attracted attention anywhere, for it was bound with iron straps, and was a good load for a very strong man."

The clerk looked at him with a bored expression, and then inquired in an indifferent tone:

"How big was de box, say?"

"About two feet long, a foot and a half wide, and six inches deep. The ends were slightly rounded, and it was covered with heavy canvas, giving it the appearance of a valise."

"An'yer say it'd take er strong man to lug a box o' dat size?" muttered the fellow, contemptuously.

"Yes; and I am not certain that one man could carry it."

"Ye don't say!" sneered the clerk. "Say, w'ot kind o' men d'ye have w'ere youse come from?"

"Pretty good men, but they wouldn't be able to carry that box any more than one of your best men here could."

"Couldn't, eh? Say, w'ot was de bloomin' t'ing filled wid dat it weighed so hefty, cully?"

"Gold!"

The clerk's jaw dropped, and he stared at the detective with wide eyes.

"Gold?" he repeated.

"Yes, gold!" replied Thad, coolly.

"Say, w'ot yer givin' us, young feller?" sneered the fellow. "Folks ain't runnin' round de streets wid boxes o' gold like dat, see?"

"Nevertheless, this particular box was filled with gold, and it was stolen some time yesterday afternoon."

It was some time before the man could recover his breath, and when he did, he faltered, timidly:

"Say, mister, how much swag was dey?"

"About two hundred thousand dollars."

"Two hund'ed t'ousand bones?"

"About that."

"Gee whizz! An'yer t'ink it got down dis way?"

"I have a strong suspicion that it did."

"Say, w'ot makes yer t'ink so?"

Thad pulled the blotter from his pocket and also the forged order and showed them to the clerk.

"Do you notice the peculiar writing of this order?" he asked.

"I see it's in purple ink, dat's all."

"Very well. Now, look at this blotter, which I found in there on one of the tables. You see that the writing on the note was blotted with that same blotter, don't you?"

The clerk took the blotter and examined it, and then grunted:

"Dat's right, mister."

"Well, what would you infer from that?"

"Dat de note was wrote in dere, I reckon; but we don't have no ink o' dat color, see?"

"That makes no difference. The writer may have written with a fountain pen filled with violet ink."

"Wal, s'pose he did, den w'ot?"

"Look at the note. Read it and see what it says."

The clerk read the order, and when he had finished, he looked up and said:

"I see w'ot ye'r gaggin' at, mister. Yer mean ter say dat de Johnny w'ot swiped de swag wrote de order in dis joint, an' consequently de swag orter be here. Is dat yer chune?"

"Either the swag or the crook who took it, or at least the latter has been here."

"Dat's right, mister," muttered the clerk.

And then suddenly starting up as with a fresh inspiration, he asked:

"Say, mister, youse is er detective, ain't yer?"

"Perhaps," replied Thad, coolly.

This discovery had a wonderful effect on the fellow.

He lost all his swagger in an instant and became as meek as a lamb.

"Say," he said, "if dat cove's round dese quarters, I'll see dat youse gits yer nippers on him. Chimmy!" he called.

A moment later a dirty faced boy put in an appearance.

"W'ot?" grunted the lad.

"Did youse er Mugsy see anyt'ing of er bloke comin' in hiar wid er box w'ot seemed too heavy fer him ter lug?"

"W'en?"

"Any time—yistyd'y er las' night, see?"

"Nope."

"Sure?"

"I dunno w'ot Mugsy seen. I never seen none," growled the boy.

"W'ere's Mugsy?"

"Down stairs."

"Call 'im, an' dat blame quick, see?"

The boy disappeared, and soon returned with another lad of about the same age, with a trifle dirtier face, if possible, than his own.

"W'ot?" muttered the last boy.

"Mugsy, did youse see anyt'ing of er bloke luggin' er box inter de house yistyd'y er las' night?"

"W'ot kin' of er box?"

"Looked sump'in' like er valise, on'y it was bound wid iron, an' peared ter be mighty hefty."

"Yep, I seen 'im!" replied the lad.

"W'ere'd 'e take it?" questioned the clerk.

"Up ter Sixteen."

"Sixteen?" mused the clerk, turning to his register. "Dat's right. Dere was er jay put up dere las' night, but he got out preshure early dis mornin'."

"Gone?" demanded Thad.

"Shure."

"Did you notice him when he went?"

"Nope. He sloped afore I come on."

"The night-clerk must have seen him, then."

"Mebbe, but as de cove paid his bill in advance, he might er slid widout showin' hisself, see?"

While the clerk was talking Thad took occasion to examine the register, and was surprised to see the name of the mysterious guest signed in violet ink, as though he were determined to leave traces for the detective to follow wherever he went!

"Did you see this man when he came in?" inquired the detective

"Nope. He mus' ter come on after six, w'en I was gone."

"Me slee man all same you talkee."

Everybody looked around, and were surprised to discover that the speaker was a Chinaman.

"W'ot d'ye say, Sing Lee?" growled the clerk.

"Me slee man alle slame you talkee," replied the Celestial, grinning from ear to ear.

"What did you see?" questioned Thad, becoming interested.

"Me slee ole man, blig, tall, blig sloulders all slame Jblon Slullivan, carry blig tlunk, heap hleavy, makee him glunt—ugh!"

"You say that he was an old man?" inquired Thad.

"Las; heap old, hlair, whiliskers white all slame shult me wasbee."

"What was he carrying?"

"Blag, all slame you talkee."

"Which way was he going, John?"

"Flunton Flerry."

"To Fulton Ferry?"

"No, him come flum Flunton Flerry."

"Which way did he go from there?"

"Upee tlown—up Blerlin' Slipee."

"Up Burling Slip."

"Las."

"What time was this, John?"

"Slix collec."

"How did you come to notice him?"

"Him glunt, an' me t'ink he faller down allee slame dlunk, an' me stlop lookee, an' me askee whallet he glot in blag, an' he say glo hellee! Len me see blag got tlicket on—Expless tlicket say Slan Flanslisco. Len me know blag glot gold in."

"What did you say to him when he told you to go to that hot place, John?" laughed the detective.

"Me slay allee light, an' make finger on nose same ttime."

Here the Chinaman put his fingers to the side of his nose in imitation of the small boy when he wishes to express his defiance of a policeman when he is out of the latter's reach.

Thad was in a quandary.

There appeared to be a certain amount of probability that the Chinaman had told the truth, but if he had, the information appeared to be of no particular value, except to prove that the thief had left the hotel and taken the gold with him. The important fact—that of where the fellow had gone—was as far off as ever.

Another thing that puzzled him was the fact that, according to the Chinaman, the man was old, which did not suit the description of the gold-brick swindler. But perhaps, after all, this was only a porter in the employ of the thief.

CHAPTER X.

A GLIMPSE OF THE GAME.

WHILE he was catechising the Chinaman the night clerk came down and started out, but was called back by the day clerk.

"Moriarity!" he called, "Hiar's a gent w'ot wants ter know sumpt'in' dat youse kin 'lighten him on, see?"

The night clerk, who was a square-jawed Hibernian, swaggered back and glanced at Thad with a sullen scowl.

"Phwat is it, sor?" he demanded in the humor of a man who had been awakened before he had finished his nap.

"You were on here from six o'clock last night, I believe?" said the detective.

"If yez'd been round here ye'd a-t'ought so," growled the night clerk.

"Do you remember a man coming in and registering this name?" pursued Thad, pointing to the name on the register.

The clerk bent over, puffed out a long whiff of smoke from a very rank cigar, and growled:

"Frederick Moser? Yes, Oi remember the duck. Phwat about him, sor?"

"What sort of a looking man was he?"

"He was a mon about your soize, mebbe a throifle hoigher, broad showidered, eyes as black as Mickey Nolan's cat, and hair to match. Phwat about him?"

"Had he any baggage?" pursued the detective, disregarding his inquiry.

"He had."

"What was it like?"

"It was a quare koind av a bag. Oi re-

member, and so heavy that it took the two of us to lug it up-stairs."

"Did he intimate what the bag contained?"

"He did not."

"Didn't you suspect what it was?"

"Oi did not. It was no business of moine, and Oi asked no questions."

"You were still on when he left this morning, were you not?"

"Oi was."

"Did you see him take the bag with him?"

"Yes, sor."

"Did he carry it himself?"

"No, sir. He kim down from his room about half-past foive, and wint out. Purty soon he kim back wid an an ould chap thot looked loike a goiant in thrainin' and thot av thim went up-stairs together. A whoile later they kim back and the ould divvle was lugging the bag, and the other man sthopped at the desk to tell me thot he was going away, which was no business o' moine, as he'd paid his bill the noight before."

"He said nothing about where he was going from here, I presume?"

"Not a wurred."

"Did they leave the place together?"

"Oi couldn't say as to thot. Maybe the ould fella wint out furrest, but Oi think there was a carriage outside waiting for thim, and they got in."

"Did you notice which way they drove?"

"Come to think of it, Oi did notice that they dhruv down-town, toward the bridge."

"Thanks," responded Thad, politely.

"Ye'r welcome, but as Oi've answered all your questions, maybe yez'll tell me phwat yez wanted to know all about this chap for?"

"Certainly. The fellow is a thief and gold-brick swindler, and the bag you saw was filled with gold."

"Gold bricks, yez m'ane?"

"Yes, gold bricks."

"Not the r'ale article?"

"Yes, pure gold."

"Howly saints! Oi thought thim fellas dealt in imitation gould bricks."

"So they do, as a rule, and so does this fellow, but this lot are genuine."

"Murther and 'oun's! Phere did he get thim?"

"Stole them, of course."

Thad left the hotel in a perplexed state of mind.

He had merely scented the trail of his game, but was as far off, probably further, than he had been when he came in, and the worst of it was, he did not know which way to turn next.

Just then he thought of the address of the woman in Fifty-seventh street, which he had in his pocket, and, as he had nothing else of a definite nature in view, he decided to call up there and see what he could find.

Taking a Fifty-eighth street train on the Sixth Avenue Elevated, he arrived at the number given in the address a little after noon, and found the place to be an immense studio-building, filled with artists of both sexes.

There was no directory, and he inquired of the elevator-man, who was a matter-of-fact old Irishman, if there was a woman by the name of Miranda Hoffman in the building, to which, to the detective's delight, the old fellow answered in the affirmative.

"On the eighth flure," observed the elevator-man, "room sivinty-foive."

Thad felt as though he had his game in hand once more, as he stepped into the elevator and began to be hoisted up.

Two minutes later he stood before the door of a studio with the name "Miranda Hoffman" engraved on a brass plate on it.

There was also a heavy old-fashioned knocker on the door, and this he raised and let fall two or three times.

A moment passed and the door was opened by a negro girl in a white apron.

"Is Mrs. Hoffman in?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir. What name, please?"

That gave the first name that came into his head, which was Arthur Newcomb, and added that he was an art critic.

The girl turned away, and soon returned with an invitation for him to enter.

The next moment he was inside the studio, which was lined with pictures, some com-

plete and others in various stages of development, and in the presence of the artist, who came forward to meet him.

Thad experienced a thrill and changed color at the sight of her, for he had no difficulty in recognizing her as the identical woman he had seen on the bridge the night before.

He was also startled at the sight of a seal ring on her hand, the seal of which consisted of a serpent!

He thought, considering her surroundings, that he might be mistaken; but no! there was every feature he had taken note of that eventful night on the bridge!

She evidently did not recognize him, for she smiled affably as she came forward, and asked him what she could do for him.

He professed to have come to see her pictures, and chatted about art for some time, meanwhile strolling about the room admiring her work, but finally sunk into a chair in front of her and observed in a matter-of-fact tone:

"That was quite an episode on the bridge the other night, wasn't it, Mrs. Hoffman?"

She stared at him in astonishment, and for an instant appeared terribly agitated, raising her hand as if about to speak. But, she suddenly cooled down, and assumed an indifferent manner.

"I do not understand you," she finally said without a quaver in her voice, which he recognized as the same he had heard the night before.

"You do not recall the incident on the bridge—High Bridge?" he pursued. "When you followed Silas Folger and Casper Murdoch, and the latter struck the former down with a knife?"

"Your words are entirely incomprehensible to me, sir," she replied with an earnestness and show of innocence that it was hard to believe not genuine. "I never even heard of either of the gentlemen you allude to, much less the incident you speak of."

Burr was perplexed, but not bluffed. With ready wit he decided to change his tactics.

"You have recently been to Chicago, have you not, Mrs. Hoffman?" he questioned.

"I have!" was the cool rejoinder.

"And on your return you met a man from California named Horace Maynard, I believe?"

She stared at him in astonishment, sprung to her feet excitedly, and raised her hand as if about to hurl some defiant words at him; but suddenly subsided, and replied coolly:

"Why, yes, I met a gentleman of that name who said he was from California. How did you know about it?"

"He informed you, I believe," pursued the detective, disregarding her question, "that he possessed a good deal of gold, which—"

At that moment Thad heard a footstep behind him, and also saw that the woman was looking over his shoulder at some one who had apparently just entered, and turning, he encountered the tall man whom he had seen on the bridge!

CHAPTER XI.

DESPERATE CHANCES.

THE two men glared at each other for a full minute before either spoke.

There was no doubt about the tall man recognizing the detective, and as for the latter, he would have known the gold brick swindler anywhere.

Thad was the first to break the silence.

"Well, sir, I hope you know me!" he said sarcastically.

"I was about to make the same remark," was the insolent retort.

"I presume you remember where we met?" continued Thad.

"I haven't the slightest idea," rejoined the other viciously.

"You have forgotten the incident of the bridge, then, although it only occurred last night?"

"I certainly have, if I ever knew anything about it."

At this point the detective was surprised by a sneering laugh at his back, from the woman.

"That is what the fellow has been talking to me about," she observed sneeringly.

"What does he mean?"

"That is more than I can tell," returned the man.

"You will both be able to recall the incident before I am done with you," interposed Thad suggestively.

Nevertheless, Burr realized that he had been too precipitate in bringing matters about as he had, but of course, he did not expect the appearance of the man when he had brought the subject up.

He now saw that there was but one of two ways out of the dilemma, back down or fight, and he decided that the former was the wiser plan, as nothing could be gained by the fight.

But the man was not inclined to have it that way, as it proved later.

"I beg your pardon," began the detective, making an attempt to get between his enemies and the door, "but I guess I have made a mistake. I was under the impression that you, Mr. Murdoch, was the man whom I had seen stab Silas Folger on High Bridge, and I was also of the opinion that Mrs. Hoffman here was a witness to the crime. Indeed, she promised you that you should be brought to justice, as I imagined. But, as I said, I suppose I was mistaken. It was somebody else whom I saw, I must believe."

As he spoke the detective kept edging toward the door, and it looked at one time as if he would succeed in reaching it, as the man did not appear to notice what he was up to, but the man did notice it later on, and quickly stepped in between the caller and the door.

Thad now saw that he was in for it, but was determined to make the most of his chance, slim as it was.

The fellow, evidently, did not expect anything of a violent nature, and smiled blandly at what he apparently considered a good joke in interrupting the detective's passage.

So, affecting not to experience any annoyance at the tall man's insolence, he quickly drew his revolver and covered him.

"Step aside!" he commanded, "and let me pass, or it will be the worse for you!"

"With pleasure!" said the man, stepping quickly aside. "Why did you not say you wanted to pass?"

This left the way open, and Thad took advantage of it by stepping briskly toward the door.

The next instant his hand was on the knob, when, to his horror he found the door locked!

Planting his back against the panels, he drew a second revolver, and turning and leveling them on the pair, he demanded:

"Open this door, or I shall make it unhealthy for you in about a second!"

"The door is not locked," answered the woman, with an affected seriousness.

"Certainly not," added the man. "Why don't you go out, if you want to?"

"I tell you it is locked," rejoined Thad savagely, "and if one of you don't come and unlock it there will be trouble."

This was answered by a burst of laughter from the pair.

At which the detective lost his temper.

Coolly cocking both pistols, he said:

"I will give you just one minute to unlock this door, and if it is not done by that time, I shall fire and shoot to kill!"

This appeared to frighten the woman a good deal, and she asked the man with apparent seriousness:

"Is the door really locked?"

"No, certainly not!" was the careless rejoinder. "It is merely an excuse on his part to bluff us."

Considering that there might be a possibility of his being mistaken, Thad put one hand behind him and tried the knob again.

Even if it had not refused to yield, the laughter that followed the action was sufficient to convince him that he was being imposed upon.

And, while he was slightly diverted in trying to open the door, the tall man took the opportunity to draw a revolver, and before Thad was aware of what he intended, the fellow fired.

Luckily his aim had not been true as intended, for the bullet only grazed the detective's cheek and buried itself in the heavy door.

This was incentive enough, and Thad opened fire without more ado.

He did not, however, fire to kill, only intending to wound his man and not hit the

woman at all; so his first shot wounded the fellow in the right arm, and his pistol fell to the floor.

His second made a flesh-wound in the fellow's left arm and the third grazed his cheek, bringing the claret profusely!

This was sufficient.

The fellow threw up his arms and called for quarter.

"For God's sake, don't fire again!" he cried. "I surrender!"

Like a flash the detective was upon him, and, snatching the right wrist, which hung limp now, although the arm was not broken, he snapped one of the handcuffs on it, and as quickly caught the other wrist and treated it in a similar manner.

"Now, sir," said Thad, in a stern voice, "you will go along with me."

"Upon what charge?" demanded the man, falteringly.

"On the charge of assaulting an officer!" replied Thad. "This is the present charge, but I have three others against you and will procure warrants as soon as we get downtown. You did me a great service when you attacked me, for it is an easy matter to indict a man when you've got him locked up. Come on!"

Murdoch, for he it was, or appeared to be, followed meekly until the door was reached, which Thad had forgotten was still locked, and he turned to ask the woman to unlock it.

But to his astonishment and horror she was gone!

Burr did not dare to leave his prisoner to look for her, but, guessing he knew where the key was, as the fellow had come in last, he demanded it of him.

Murdoch strenuously denied having the key, and Thad was forced to the alternative of searching his pockets himself, which resulted in the finding of the key.

Thad then unlocked the door and marched his prisoner to the elevator and rung the annunciator.

The car soon came up, and the elevator man stared in amazement at the prisoner, whom he evidently knew very well, in irons and covered with blood as he was.

But he dared not address Murdoch, so much in terror was he of the awful detective, as he evidently considered the captor.

Once in the street, the detective turned his prisoner over to a policeman to guard until he should return and look for the woman; but his mission was a futile one, for, although he had the key to the studio and let himself in, the woman was nowhere to be found.

Realizing that his prisoner was in danger of bleeding to death if he was not hurried away to the station, where a surgeon could be had, he had the policeman call a carriage, which the two entered and drove toward the nearest police station.

The prisoner was silent for some moments after they started, but after a while spoke.

"You say you have three other charges against me," he began. "What are they, pray?"

"One is for working the gold-brick game on one Earnest Maynard; one for murdering one Silas Folger, and the other is for robbing one Horace Maynard of two hundred thousand dollars in gold. I presume you are ready to plead guilty to one and all of the charges?"

"On the contrary," rejoined Murdoch, coolly, "I plead innocent of each and all of the charges."

"That will do you little good, as I have positive proof in the first two cases, and very strong circumstantial evidence in the third one."

"What is your proof that I murdered Folger?"

"My own eyes," responded Thad. "I saw you do it."

"But suppose I prove to you that Folger is alive and well?"

"That will be well for you, that is all, but the other two cases will still stand against you."

CHAPTER XII.

FROM DEATH BACK TO LIFE.

MURDOCH smiled grimly at the detective's last remark, and then observed, dryly:

"Well, the man you speak of is alive and as well as you are."

"What was the meaning of the scene I witnessed on the bridge last night, then?"

"I do not know what you mean."

"Yes, you do."

"I give you my word that I do not."

"That is worth nothing in the face of the fact that I saw you with my own eyes."

"Saw what?"

"See here, there is no use making strange over this matter. You might be able to play that game on some, but I'm too old a customer to be caught in that way. You know as well as I do that I saw you walk with Silas Folger for several blocks until you reached High Bridge, then pass onto the bridge, and when about half-way over, stop and talk for some time. Finally you went on and he waited for you. In your absence the woman whom we just left came out of the shadow where she had been concealed and had a talk with him, but when they saw you returning she slipped away again and concealed herself by crouching down in the shadow of the parapet."

"Then followed some hot words between yourself and Folger, and at length you pretended to think that he was about to attack you, and you stabbed him. At least you struck him with a knife in your hand, and he fell, to all appearances, dead. Then this woman came out and accused you, and you were about to attack her with a knife, when I interfered and prevented a second crime. Do you remember none of this?"

"How should I, when there is not one word of truth in it, so far as it relates to me?"

"As I told you before, your denial will do no good, for, in addition to my evidence, the woman will be put upon the stand, and she surely cannot deny what I have told you."

"You astound me, sir," said the fellow feebly, for the loss of blood was beginning to tell on his strength. "I never heard such a thing. Here you openly accuse me to my face of a thing of which I know as little as the child unborn."

"And I am certainly astounded at you, sir," rejoined Thad. "I have had to deal with a good many stubborn people in my time, but you beat them all. However, it will do you no good."

"Why not?"

"Because you will be proven guilty."

"I should like to bet you on that."

"I wouldn't mind betting if I were in the habit of such things, for I know I should have a dead sure thing, but it is useless to multiply words, for I know you are guilty and you know that I know it, so we understand each other."

"Oh, if you know it, there is nothing more to be said," retorted the fellow sneeringly.

"You may not find it so easy to prove your assertion as to make it, however. But you say that I robbed somebody of a lot of gold. How do you know that?"

"As I said, I have pretty good evidence of it. You sent an order from a hotel in Madison street, pretending that the order was written and signed by Horace Maynard, requesting the keeper of a hotel in Forty-second street to send a box of gold which had been left in his house, to you, and the gold was sent. It is unnecessary for me to tell you that the order was forged in the name of the owner of the gold, and that you did the forging."

"In reply to all this, I can only say that there is not one word of truth in it," interposed Murdoch with as much coolness as though he had been uttering the truth.

"Now," pursued the detective, as if the other had made no answer to his last speech, "I have but one request to make, and one bit of advice to offer."

"What are those?" inquired the other wearily.

"Tell me where the gold is deposited. This is the request. The advice is, that it will be better for your case if you make this revelation."

"You think it would go better with me, do you?"

"I do, for a certainty!"

"And you would advise me to make this revelation?"

"I certainly would."

"In what way would it better my case?"

"It would lighten your sentence, undoubtedly."

"Indeed?"

"I am sure of it."

"It is too bad, but I can never tell."

"Why not?"

"For the simple reason that I know no more about it than you do, sir."

"Then you refuse to tell?"

"How could I do otherwise?"

"That is your own affair."

By this time they had reached the station, and Thad turned his prisoner over to the sergeant in charge.

"He needs a little trimming up," explained the detective, "and I shall leave him for the present, but we shall want him down at the Tombs before long, as I have three other charges against him."

While they were deliberating upon the matter, and before the prisoner was locked in his cell, the police surgeon was called in and he dressed the prisoner's wounds.

While this was in progress, Thad was suddenly surprised by the appearance of a man who had come in to see Murdoch.

His face was familiar, but he could not at first recall where he had seen him.

But it soon came back to him.

It was Silas Folger, the man who was supposed to be dead!

He had a short consultation with the tall man, and then hurried out of the station-house.

In a little while he returned with an elderly man, who had the appearance of being a man of wealth and respectability.

Another consultation was had; then the sergeant was called into the council.

A little later Folger was seen to pass out into another part of the building, which was the court-room, and as the court was still in session, or had just about adjourned, he soon returned with the information that the judge would hear the case at once, with a view to fixing the prisoner's bail.

The prisoner was led through the court-room, and Thad followed.

Here he heard the charge which he preferred against Murdoch read, and the judge at once fixed the bail.

The old gentleman came forward and signed the bond, and, to the detective's disgust, the man was about to walk out of court; but the wary Burr was too quick for that kind of a deal, and asked to have the prisoner detained pending the swearing out of another warrant against him.

This request was granted, and the warrant for the fellow's arrest on the charge of practicing the gold-brick game issued.

This caused another delay, but the little man was equal to the occasion, and soon had another bondsman on hand.

But no sooner was the prisoner released on that bond than Thad had his third and last warrant issued and served.

It was no use, however, for the first bondsman signed another bail bond, and the detective had the mortification of seeing his prisoner go free after all!

He had one satisfaction, though, and that was that the bonds had been fixed so high that there was not much chance of the fellow escaping, if the bondsmen were inclined to look out for their interests, which they were likely to do.

As Folger was about to pass from the court-room, Thad detained him to speak to him.

"Your name is Folger, is it not?" he asked.

"It is," rejoined the little man affably.

"You recall the incident on the bridge last night, of course?"

Folger looked at him with a mystified expression.

"The incident on the bridge?" he repeated.

"I don't understand you."

Thad lost his patience.

"Do you mean to say that you do not recall the incident of last night, when you and Murdoch crossed High Bridge and you had some words, after which he struck you, or struck at you, and you fell as though you were killed or mortally wounded?"

"You astonish me," was the little man's reply, and he certainly looked it, for he gazed at the detective as if the latter had made some outrageous assertion.

"You do not recall it?" repeated Thad, impatiently.

"How should I, when this is the first I have heard of it?"

"This is most remarkable!" declared the detective. "I saw you with my own eyes. I saw you pass on the bridge together, I heard you quarreling, and finally saw him strike you down, where you lay, to all appearances dead."

"I assure you, my dear sir, that you are mistaken, for nothing of the kind ever occurred. Good day."

And the little man walked away and left the astounded detective.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CONTEST OF CUNNING.

Burr was more than puzzled at the turn matters had taken, and he was still more so at the unaccountable conduct of the three people he had lately interviewed.

Each in turn had solemnly denied any knowledge of the affair on the bridge, when he himself knew that they knew all about it.

This would not have appeared so strange had they all been equally guilty of a crime, but, so far as the detective knew, Folger and Mrs. Hoffman were perfectly innocent, and were sufferers at the hands of Murdoch.

Then, why should they not only tell the same story, but go out of their way to defend him, and deny the facts?

He then recalled the allusion he had seen made in the note which he had picked up on the bridge to the Mystic Brotherhood, and cutely concluded that it was all attributable to that organization, whatever it might be, and it was evident that the members were sworn to stand by and defend one another under any and all circumstances, which was the special object of the "Brotherhood."

Another significant fact was, that the society appeared to have no lack of wealthy backers, and for that reason, more than anything else, Thad realized that the task of capturing and convicting any of them would be by no means an easy one.

When the little man left him, Thad looked about for Murdoch with a view to keeping him in sight, hoping thereby to discover the whereabouts of the gold which he had taken from the old Californian, but he had mysteriously disappeared.

So, again the detective appeared to have come to a standstill in his case.

He was in a sore dilemma which way to turn, and in the midst of it, decided to pay another visit to the woman, with a hope of discovering something in that direction.

After rapping two or three times at her studio door, he decided to use the key in his possession, and go in, unbidden.

But, when he got inside it was only to find matters as they were on his last visit.

The woman had not returned, and there was no indication that she had been back since.

It occurred to him, then, to investigate the place and see, if possible, where she had gone and how she escaped without going by way of the door.

At one end of the apartment or studio there was an alcove and in it a couch or bed-lounge, but beyond that the wall appeared to be solid. There was no indication of a door of any description.

He searched the walls in every direction for the same purpose, but in vain.

He even examined the couch, hoping that it might reveal some secret, but it did not, and was about to abandon the search in despair, when his attention was attracted to a large picture which hung on the wall at one end of the alcove.

A close scrutiny and he was astonished at the result of his investigation.

What had appeared to be a heavy gilt frame was nothing more than a flat painting in imitation of a frame, and, like the picture it inclosed, was painted on a panel.

This panel he had little difficulty in opening, as the lock was very frail, the projectors doubtless depending entirely upon the illusion of the sham picture-frame for protection.

By placing a strong knife, which he always carried, between the panel and the jamb and giving it a vigorous twist, the panel swung open, revealing a dark passage.

The fact of the passage being dark did

not indicate that it ran any considerable distance, as all that part of the room was dark, and the detective stepped through the opening and started along the passage.

He had not proceeded far before he came to a door, which he could tell by feeling was a frail structure of thin pine boards.

He was in the act of applying his knife-blade to this also, when he was checked by the sound of voices inside.

Placing his ear to the door, he listened.

One of the voices he readily recognized as that of the Hoffman woman, which, as has been mentioned, was peculiarly coarse and masculine.

The others—and there appeared to be at least three others—were unfamiliar.

At first he could hear no distinct articulation, but upon feeling about on the surface of the door he discovered a keyhole, and by applying his ear to this he could hear quite distinctly.

About the first words he made out perfectly were:

"Do you consider it safe to leave it here?"

This appeared to have been uttered by a woman, not the artist, for the latter responded:

"Why not? Nobody in creation will ever find the way in here."

"You cannot tell," objected the first speaker. "Greater mysteries have been solved than even your secret door."

"But that was because there was a reason for investigation. In this case there can be no reason for it, for nobody will suspect that the gold has been brought here."

At the mention of the word "gold," Thad's heart bounded.

This, then, was the fence used by the mystic gentry! and the taking of it to the cheap East Side hotel, and from there off in another direction, was only a blind.

Burr now saw through the ruse of the signing of the register in violet ink—the same as that employed in the composition of the forged order. It had all been done for a purpose, to throw any detective who might choose to follow the trail off in a different direction!

Meanwhile the conversation within continued.

"You do not imagine, then, that they will be able to trace it here?" asked the person who had first spoken.

"Impossible."

"How?"

"The thing has been planned too cleverly. If the detectives should discover the forged order, it will not take them long to trace the package to the shady hotel on the East Side, from whence it was taken to a small town in New Jersey, and from there brought back here, and all this was done so adroitly that no one in creation will be able to trace it."

"Do you imagine nobody saw it go to or from the hotel, or from there to New Jersey, or from there back here?"

"It is not likely, for it was all accomplished in so short a space of time."

"And you planned all this yourself, did you?"

"How can you ask?"

"I know you did," faltered the other timidly. "You are a wonderful woman, Miranda Hoffman!"

At this point there appeared to be an interruption, for the talking ceased and Thad heard the closing of a door.

This was followed by the sound of shuffling feet, and it was apparent that there had been a new arrival.

This was confirmed a moment later, when he heard the artist exclaim:

"Oh, you are back, eh?"

"Yes," was the reply. "They kept me longer than I expected, but not as long as they would have liked to have done."

And this was the voice of Murdoch!

"Have they discovered anything?" asked the woman.

"Yes, a good deal. More than I imagined it possible for them to discover. They must have a keen one on the case."

"The fellow that was here?"

"Yes; the same. He has already traced the thing to the hotel, and, for aught I know, here. The worst of it is, he has traced it to me!"

"How do you know?"

"He told me so."

"What did you say?"

"Denied it, of course."

"What is to be done?"

"This gold must be got away from here, and that at once. If it is found in my possession, the case will go dead against me. They have too much evidence already."

"Where shall you take it?"

Thad did not understand the answer, but imagined he heard the name Hook Mountain, which he knew to be a great resort for crooks.

Burr felt that it was now his time to act.

He would quietly slip out of the building, procure a detail of men and, surrounding the place and closing in from both directions, capture thieves and gold all at once!

Gliding softly back through the dark passage, he was about to push open the panel, when he was astonished to hear some one walking in the studio on the other side!

He hesitated, and heard the person—there appeared to be but one—approaching the panel. The person came directly up to it, paused, and then turned back, and, a moment later he heard him leave the studio.

Now, he thought, was his opportunity for escape, so he pushed the panel open and stepped through into the studio.

But, at that moment, he heard more footsteps, and the next instant half a dozen rough-looking men walked in and confronted him!

CHAPTER XIV.

SHARP BUT DECISIVE.

ONE glance at the crowd of men who had entered the studio was sufficient to show the detective that they were a desperate lot and would scruple at nothing.

It was also seen that they were armed; therefore there was but one way out of the dilemma, and that was to fight.

But, this was a desperate alternative, inasmuch as there were six to one.

Thad thought rapidly; in times of peril he was preternaturally quick both to think and do.

He would much rather have used strategy, if such a thing had been possible, but this, now, appeared out of the question.

He recurred to the passage; would he not stand a better chance in there of defense or flight?

He would at least have the advantage of being in the darkness, while his assailants would be in the light.

Making a quick movement backward, but still keeping his eyes on the ruffians, he was at the panel again.

The men were apparently prepared to see him retreat, and closed upon him, each one drawing his revolver.

As yet the detective had not drawn his weapon.

The only difficulty now was to get the panel open and get through before they had time to use their pistols.

The ruffians divined his purpose and raised their revolvers, covering him.

One of them, apparently the leader, growled out:

"Don't ye dare!"

Then Thad realized that he was in close quarters, indeed.

Everything depended upon chance, or luck, now.

If he moved, they were sure to fire, and his life depended upon their marksmanship.

If they proved to be poor shots, there was a chance for life; if they were good shots, his time had doubtless come!

But, it was only a matter of time at best.

If he remained still, they would kill him, sooner or later.

So he determined upon the hazard, and with a quick movement, he threw the panel open.

This was followed, as he had expected, by a volley of shots from the pistols.

Strange to say, none of them took effect!

And the action gave him his one advantage.

The confusion and smoke incident to the fusillade offered him the opportunity he had wished for.

Quicker than a flash he stepped through the panel, and closed it after him.

Then planting himself at a sufficient distance from the opening to be concealed by the darkness, he awaited results.

For an instant there was a lively shuffling of feet outside; then, suddenly, it became quiet.

The meaning of this was plain. The men realized the situation and the advantage the detective had in the darkness, and hesitated.

A minute passed, and nothing had been done.

Hoarse voices in dispute came to his ears, but the panel did not open.

It was evident he had them disconcerted if not in a panic.

There was not one in all that crowd of ruffians with nerve sufficient to risk his life by opening the panel!

As time went on the wrangling increased, until it sounded as if it must end in bloodshed.

Evidently each one was urging the other to make the first move, and no one dared to be the first.

The situation from being thrilling, had grown comical to the dauntless detective but though anxious to know what the outcome would be, he patiently bided his time and listened for developments.

Suddenly there came a change.

It appeared that a seventh person had entered the studio from the outer door, and appeared to be in authority, for he was ordering the men peremptorily to their duty.

But, even his sternness was not equal to their cowardice, and they still hesitated.

Finally the leader—and it appeared to be Murdoch—lost his patience, and, cursing the lot for a pack of cowards, he left the studio.

Thad guessed what was coming next, and prepared himself accordingly.

He soon found that his prediction had been correct, for the next instant the door on his left was pushed open, and the person who had been rash enough to do it, was still more rash in putting his head within.

The succeeding instant he was doubtless sorry for his folly, for he withdrew the head with remarkable celerity, but not until Thad had administered a severe thump with the butt of his pistol, which had undoubtedly caused it to ache with considerable violence.

This was followed by a violent set-to of words within the room beyond the door—the one in which he had heard the conversation about the gold.

Thad could not help laughing in his sleeve, precarious as his own position was, to think that at least seven men and two women were afraid to attack him, and he realized more forcibly than ever the wisdom of his action in returning to the dark passage.

Meanwhile the ruffians in the studio had become mute.

They were evidently completely cowed, and he was half inclined to make a break for liberty in that direction, believing, that, under the existing circumstances, he could do so without danger.

He was about to carry out this project, when something occurred to stay him temporarily.

He stood about half-way between the door and the opening covered by the panel, and was therefore compelled to watch in two opposite directions.

While his eye and mind were temporarily fixed on the panel while contemplating the break, the door suddenly opened and Murdoch and two of the men sprung into the passage.

This was so unexpected that he was entirely unprepared for it, and for an instant he was beside himself as to what to do.

But he was not long in making up his mind.

There was but one of two things to do now, escape through the panel or fight it out on the spot.

He still had the advantage of the men who had just entered, as the light from the door they had left open shone upon them, while he was still concealed by the darkness.

Raising his pistol, which was a self-cocker, he fired two shots among the men, but low enough down not to kill, only desiring to wound them.

This threw them into a state of panic, and taking advantage of it, he slipped through the panel into the studio.

Four of the men were still there and watching for him, and unfortunately the shots he had fired while in the passage had

put them on their guard, and they were ready for his appearance.

But he was also prepared.

He expected they would be ready for him and knew that they would fire the instant he appeared.

So, as he stepped through the panel, he threw himself flat upon the floor.

As anticipated, they fired a volley, but as a matter of course, it passed harmlessly over him, and the next instant he was upon his feet again, and with the quickness of lightning, fired two shots in rapid succession at his assailants.

This, combined with the smoke of their own weapons, put the men into a state of temporary confusion, and, taking advantage of it, the detective darted past them and succeeded in reaching the door before they had recovered their self-possession.

Luckily the door was unlocked, and he made his escape.

Five minutes later he was in the street, and, appealing to the first policeman that came in his way, he had him go to the nearest patrol-box and send in a call for a patrol-wagon and a detail of men.

This was promptly done, and after half an hour's tedious wait, the wagon with the detail arrived.

It had grown dark by this time, but Thad had never for an instant removed his eyes from the entrance to the building where the men were whom he wished to capture.

As soon as the squad arrived he had them dismount, and, with ten of them at his heels, he returned to the studio-building.

The poor old Irish elevator-man was worse frightened than ever when he saw the squad of blue-coats going up, and evidently wondered what was going to happen next.

As soon as Thad got his men to the top of the building he marched them back to the studio.

Placing five of them to guard the door of the adjoining room where the gold was deposited, he opened the studio door and entered with the other five.

To his astonishment the four ruffians had disappeared; but, after a moment's thought he concluded that they had taken refuge in the other room, and pushed on through the dark passage.

CHAPTER XV.

SLIPPERY CUSTOMERS.

BURR was a little surprised that he did not meet any of the crowd of ruffians or their leader in the passage, and he was still more so to find the door to the room open.

Before entering he paused and listened, but could hear nothing, and then he began to suspect that something was wrong.

He hesitated no longer, but bolted into the room at once.

As he had already feared and half-suspected, there was no one there.

How could they have made their escape in so short a time?

They certainly could not have taken the gold with them, he mused, and set about looking for the famous canvas-covered bag.

The room into which he had come was evidently a sort of living-room, that is, light meals could be got there when it was desirable, such as artists are in the habit of doing, and aside from a table, a few chairs and some dishes, there was very little in the room.

Therefore the search for the bag of gold was simple, and it did not require a great while to discover that it was not there.

The detective was dumfounded.

It seemed a most remarkable thing that they should have escaped from this building, and the eighth floor at that, without any one seeing them. But to have removed that heavy box was still more remarkable.

Up to this time he had done his work in silence, while the five policemen, including a captain, had looked on with mute curiosity.

When the captain saw that he was defeated in his aim, and the detective turned upon him with a face full of consternation, he asked:

"What is it, Mr. Burr? Has your game flown?"

"Yes, and that is not the worst of it, they have taken the swag, which I did not imagine it possible for them to take in the short space of time since I have been away."

"Perhaps they haven't taken it, after all."

"Oh, yes, they have. There is no place here for them to hide it. They must have taken it."

"What was the nature of it?"

"A box containing gold bullion."

"Gold bullion? How much was there?"

"Two hundred thousand dollars!"

"Whew! A good deal of metal for them to remove in so short a time. Are you sure it was ever here?"

"Oh, certainly."

"Did you see it?"

"No, but I heard them speaking about it, and I know in reason that it was here."

"It is very strange. Perhaps the elevator-man can tell you something about it."

"I shall inquire of him, but he is such a stupid old ape that the chances are that he cannot tell me anything."

And then, without another word, the detective left the room and sought the elevator-man.

As Thad had expected, the old fellow knew nothing more than that a crowd of men had gone down, accompanied by two women, but whether they had any baggage with them or not he could not tell.

The young man in the office down-stairs, however, who had taken particular notice of the queer-looking crowd, was quite sure that they had no baggage with them.

He was positive that they had nothing of the description Thad gave of the bag of gold.

He had also noticed that the two women and one of the men—"the nicest one"—had taken a hack as soon as they got outside, while the six ruffians had gone away on foot.

Thad did not know whether to put any faith in this report or not.

If it was correct, then the bag of gold must still be up-stairs somewhere, and he returned to the studio.

Here he again instituted a search, and went over the premises more thoroughly than he had before, but all to no purpose.

The gold was not there.

Again he returned to the street, and he was more at a loss which way to turn than ever.

Dismissing the police detail, he took a cab and drove to the residence of Inspector Williams—it now being past his office hours—for the purpose of having a consultation.

This was a rare thing for the self-confident detective to do, as he usually managed his cases without much, if any, advice from outside. But in this particular case he felt himself handicapped by the powerful and wealthy organization which appeared to be behind the swindlers, and he realized that it would be necessary to have advice, if not more substantial assistance.

The inspector was glad to see him, and at once asked how he was getting on with the case.

"Not as well as I could wish," replied Thad, with more despondency than the inspector had ever seen him evince.

"Why, what's the trouble?"

Thad related what he had done, and concluded with an account of the Mystic Brotherhood.

"I am not surprised that you have run upon that organization," observed Williams. "I have known of its existence indirectly for a long time, but you are the first one of the boys who has really succeeded in locating any of its members."

"What is to be done?"

"There is but one thing to be done, and that is to prevail upon the police judges to refuse bail when one of them is arrested. So long as any of them are abroad, they will make trouble for you. I am sorry I did not know of the arrest you made to-day, and I would have tried to prevent the judge from taking bail. These rascals will foil us as long as they can use money, for they have plenty of it."

"Very well, then, inspector, you have a talk with the various justices to-morrow, and try and arrange it so that these fellows will not be admitted to bail, and I have no doubt I can manage them."

"What is your next move, my boy?"

"I can hardly tell. I am for the present at the end of my row, but I hope to run

upon something before the lapse of many hours."

The inspector was silent for some time, and then resumed in a meditative sort of way:

"Let me see, you tell me that this fellow Maynard—the younger one—was very anxious to get the gold all into his own hands?"

"Yes."

"Of course, this made it easier to be humbugged."

"Undoubtedly."

"But there is another way of looking at it. Has it ever occurred to you that there might be a great big hoax in the story of the gold-brick swindle?"

"Impossible, inspector."

"Why impossible?"

"Where would be the motive?"

"That I cannot tell, but I ask you whether you have ever thought of such a thing?"

"I have not. How came you to think of it?"

"I'll tell you. As you say, this fellow gave the gold brick man ten thousand dollars in good money for what was supposed to be fifty thousand dollars in spurious metal."

"Yes?"

"And then the swindler, not content with this, robs the victim's father of the two hundred thousand dollars. Why should he have bothered his head with the trifling sum of ten thousand, which he must have known would get him into trouble sooner or later, when he could get twenty times as much with a very good chance of never being discovered, it not being necessary, as in the other case, for him to show his face?"

"There may be something in the theory, inspector," assented Thad, "but what is your inference? That Maynard, the younger, has something to do with the gold robbery?"

"That is it exactly."

"What was the object of the alleged gold-brick swindle?"

"Simply to mislead us, to distract suspicion from himself by putting us on a false trail. Did you see the gold bricks he purchased from the alleged swindler?"

"I did not."

"He didn't even offer to show them to you, did he?"

"No, he did not."

"Well, suppose you go out there now, and see if he won't have them ready to show you if you ask him."

"I see your drift. You think he will have enough real gold bricks to exhibit as the bogus ones, in case anybody wants to see the latter."

"That is it."

"Very well, I shall go out and see him, although I must tell you to begin with that I do not put a great deal of faith in your theory, inspector."

"You may be right. There may not be anything in it, but from the way the case has developed so far, I am inclined to think there is, and it will do no harm to look into it, anyway."

CHAPTER XVI.

ON A NEW TRAIL.

FOLLOWING the inspector's advice, Burr called at the house of Earnest Maynard in Kingsbridge the following morning.

"Ah, this is the detective?" he said as soon as he saw Thad. "Well, what progress have you made toward finding my gold brick swindler?"

"Pretty fair," replied Thad. "I think I am on his track."

"That is good! I hope you will soon catch him."

"That is only a matter of time. By the way, have you had a visit from your father yet?"

"My father!" exclaimed Maynard in great astonishment.

"Yes. He is in the city. Has he not called upon you yet?"

"My dear sir, you jest. My father is dead."

Thad was puzzled.

Why had not the old man called upon his son?

There must be a reason for it.

It was seconds before he spoke, and then he said:

"You are quite sure that you do not know that your father is not dead, Mr. Maynard?"

"Of course I am not quite sure," returned the other. "I haven't heard from him in a good many years, and I naturally suppose he is dead. I put no faith in what the gold brick rascal told me about it, and for aught I know, he may be living. But, if he is, it is very strange that he does not let the fact be known to those who should know."

Thad scrutinized the speaker's face carefully and was confident he was telling the truth.

"Well, sir," began Thad in a serious tone, "I have to inform you that your father is not dead—that he is at present in the city, and that he was robbed night before last of two hundred thousand dollars in gold."

"You astonish me, Mr. Burr! This cannot be possible!"

"It is not only possible but extremely probable."

"Have you seen him?"

"I have."

"Did you speak to him about me?"

"I did."

"Did he say nothing about coming out to see me?"

"Yes, he said he was coming out the day before yesterday. He was on his way out the night I was out here, but seeing me, he followed me back to the city."

"Why did he do that?"

"He had heard that you had been swindled and that I was working on the case, and he desired to speak to me about it."

"And you say he too, was robbed?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"The very night he came to see me. The robbery was committed some time between the time he left the hotel to come out here and his return to the hotel."

"And the amount?"

"Two hundred thousand dollars."

"Which he was bringing to us heirs, I suppose?"

"That is what his object was."

"And have you found nothing about who did it?"

"Yes, I know pretty well who the robber is. The only thing is to catch him."

"This is a most remarkable affair. I cannot see why he should not have come to see us to receive our sympathy, if for nothing else. It is most remarkable."

"It is remarkable."

And the more Thad thought of it, now that it had been brought to his mind, the more remarkable he thought it was.

For the life of him he could assign no good reason for it.

Perhaps, he thought, the old man had learned of his son's selfishness in trying to get possession of all the wealth, and had kept aloof from him on that account.

"By the way, Mr. Maynard," resumed the detective after a long and thoughtful pause, "you never showed me the gold bricks you bought of that fellow."

"That is true," replied the gardener, rising hastily. "We had so much to talk about the day you were out here that it slipped my memory completely. I'll go fetch some of them."

With that he left the room, and very shortly returned with a gold brick in each hand.

"There they are," he said, laying them on the table in front of the detective.

"Aren't they natural?"

"They do look natural," rejoined Thad, eyeing the bricks suspiciously.

"Almost any one would take them for genuine, wouldn't he?"

"Yes."

But Thad's answer was purely mechanical.

He was not thinking what he said, for at that moment he was deeply engrossed in the examination of one of the bricks.

To all appearance it was genuine.

The weight was there and so was the color.

He turned it over and over and finally asked:

"Have you had this one tested, Mr. Maynard?"

"Let me see," returned the other, taking the brick into his own hands and examining it. "I don't think I had that one

tested, but this one I did," he went on, lifting the other brick from the table and handing it to the detective. "You see here where the jeweler bored it."

"Have you any acid about the place?" inquired the detective, disregarding the other's allusion to the other brick.

"I have not," was the reply.

"How many of the bricks did you have tested?"

"About half of them. A little more than half. There are fifteen of them and I had eight of them tested."

"And they were all spurious?"

"Every one of them."

"Suppose we take the other seven to a goldsmith and have them tested?"

"Wouldn't it be better to have a goldsmith come here? They are pretty heavy you know. They weigh about fourteen pounds apiece."

"Very well; that will do; but you must let me choose the jeweler."

Maynard looked at him in astonishment.

"What do you mean?" he cried in consternation.

This was the first symptom of guilt Thad had discovered in him, but he was sure that he had hit the right spot this time.

"Simply that I do not believe these bricks to be all spurious," replied the detective, and he watched the effect of his speech upon the gardener.

But, the result was disappointing, for, instead of an expression of apprehension, his countenance betokened hope and gratification.

"Do you think it possible?" he cried exuberantly.

"I believe it to be the case—part, if not all of them."

"Great Scott!" cried the fellow, grasping his arm in a vise-like clutch. "It ain't possible! I'm afraid you're raising my hopes for nothing. But, if it should turn out that way, by George! I'll give you the heaviest brick in the lot!"

Thad was puzzled at this conduct. It certainly was not the conduct of a guilty man, but he had seen too much acting in his life to allow that to have any weight with him.

He was still determined to have the bricks tested by a jeweler whom he could rely upon, and ascertain whether there was really anything in Inspector Williams's theory, so the two men left the house together.

So determined was Thad to accomplish his purpose that he went clear down to Forty-second street for a jeweler whom he knew and took the man back to Kingsbridge with him.

But the detective was too good a judge of human nature not to see, long before the jeweler had tested the first brick, that Maynard had believed the gold to be spurious, for his gleeful anticipation of them turning out genuine amounted almost to hysterics before they got back to his house.

The moment the jeweler looked at the bricks he smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"Another gold brick swindle, eh?" he said.

"Perhaps so," replied Thad dryly. "But first see whether they are not genuine, and then let us talk."

"I can tell you that now, so far as that is concerned," cried the goldsmith, stung by Thad's insinuation.

"Very well, give us your opinion, Mr. Stoner," said Thad in a milder tone, "and then prove it by your acid."

"It is not my opinion merely that I give you, when I say that they are spurious. And now for the proof."

With that he set to work testing the bricks.

In twenty minutes it was done, and the detective was satisfied that they were spurious, that Inspector Williams had made a mistake for once, and that he himself had wronged an honest man in suspecting him of complicity in a crime of which he was innocent.

It was late in the afternoon when Thad left Maynard's house, and on reaching Forty-second street again he went directly to the hotel where the old Californian had been stopping and inquired for him.

"He's gone," responded the clerk. "He left the same night that the robbery occurred."

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE RIGHT TRACK.

WHEN Burr discovered that the old Californian had gone he suspected that something was wrong.

He saw, or thought he did, that he had been on the wrong track all along, and the inspector's advice, while being erroneous in itself, had been the means of putting him right.

He now believed that the alleged theft of the old man's gold was a fraud, and had been invented for a purpose.

What the purpose was he was not yet in a position to tell, but that there was a purpose, and a subtle one, he had not the least doubt.

Then he thought of the old man who had been described to him as going to the hotel to carry the box of gold, and was satisfied that he was none other than the alleged Californian.

So far Murdoch appeared to be the leading character in the business, but this old man undoubtedly had something to do with it also.

There was one thing which still puzzled him, and that was the conversation he had heard in the room off the studio regarding the box of gold.

What could have been the meaning of that?

He still could not get it out of his head that they must have had the gold there at the time he heard the conversation.

In this frame of mind the detective returned home, and found a visitor waiting to see him.

The visitor was a respectable, well-to-do-looking business man, and he was from Bound Brook, New Jersey.

Thad hadn't talked to him five minutes before he found that he had been a victim of the gold-brick swindlers.

"Yes," he replied in answer to a question, "I have been taken in by one of the gold-brick gentry."

"How did it happen?" questioned Thad.

"Well," returned the stranger, coloring a good deal, "it was my own fault. I was willing to take what did not belong to me, and got taken in. Nevertheless, I would like to see the swindler punished."

"Explain," demanded Thad.

"Well, it was like this: I had read in the papers that a man had been robbed in New York of two hundred thousand dollars' worth of gold in bricks, and when this man came to me and told me that he had ten thousand dollars' worth of the gold which he would dispose of for seven thousand dollars, I was unable to resist the temptation, and bought the stuff."

"Only to find it bogus, eh?"

"Yes."

"What kind of a looking man was it?"

"He was a large, broad-shouldered man with black eyes and a dark complexion."

"You need go no further," smiled the detective.

"Do you know him?"

"I do."

"He claims to be a Californian. Is he?"

"As much as you are. When did this happen?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"It must have been late."

"Yes; I should have said evening, for it was about seven o'clock or thereabouts. I know it was getting dark."

"I knew it must have been at least that."

"Why?"

"Because I had him under arrest at two o'clock, and saw him as late as four. He must have made good time after he got away."

"He must. But I was not the only one he did up in our neighborhood."

"No?"

"No. Three others suffered the same fate as I did."

"After you, I suppose?"

"Yes, after me."

"Would you be able to identify the man if you were to see him again?"

"Yes, anywhere."

"Well, I am on his track, and hope to run him down soon, and if I succeed, I may call upon you, among others, to identify him at the trial."

"I shall be only too glad to do so. If I never see a cent of my money again, it will

be some satisfaction to have the rascal punished for the crime."

This revelation proved to the detective that his latest theory was the correct one.

The pretended theft of the two hundred thousand dollars was only a catch, and he now understood the motive of it.

As the thieves had intended, the matter had been advertised in the papers, and they were now taking advantage of it to gull the simple by telling them that the gold bricks they were offering were some which had been stolen from the old Californian.

Burr was satisfied now that he had got the right end of the clue, but he was as much distracted as ever as to how to go about capturing the clever swindlers.

Murdoch was out on heavy bonds, and his trial would come off in a few days, and, until then, the detective could not very well arrest him on the same charge.

There appeared to be one advantage in his favor. Inasmuch as the fellow had not succeeded in getting the large amount it was at first represented he had, it would hardly be worth his while to jump his bail.

He must have great confidence in his claim that he could prove an *alibi*.

As it was still early when the Jerseyman left him, and having nothing else to do, Thad concluded to pay one more visit to the studio in Fifty-seventh street, although after the episode of the night before, he had little hope of finding anybody there.

But in this he was agreeably mistaken.

He found a young and very pretty lady there, late as it was—in the neighborhood of nine o'clock, although she was on the point of closing the studio for the night. Indeed, she would not have been there; she said, only there had been visitors, and she had just got rid of them.

"I was anxious to see Mrs. Hoffman," explained Thad. "Is the lady about?"

"That is my name," she replied.

Burr was taken aback.

"There must be some mistake," he said.

"The lady I wanted to see is much older than you, tall and dark."

"Oh, I know whom you mean," she rejoined, laughing. "That is not Mrs. Hoffman. Her name is Murdoch."

"What?"

"Yes. She has been renting my studio in my absence, and from what I hear she has not behaved in the best manner in the world."

"But she claimed that her name was Hoffman!"

"So I understand. I do not know what her object was, but I have just learned that she took my name for some reason. My name is on the door. Perhaps that is the reason."

"Is she the wife of the man called Casper Murdoch?"

"I believe so."

"Where are they now?"

"I do not know."

"When did you return, Mrs. Hoffman?"

"Yesterday."

"Were you here when the trouble occurred?"

"Oh, yes; I was in the other room there."

"And you were in conversation with Mrs. Murdoch about noon or a little after?"

"I believe I was."

"Pardon me, but I chanced to overhear a portion of that conversation, and perhaps you can enlighten me as to the nature of it."

"I don't recall it now."

"You were talking about some gold which had been stolen, and this woman claimed that it was in the room where you were. From what I heard, I was inclined to think it referred to a large amount of gold which had been stolen from a man who had recently arrived from California. Am I right?"

"Not exactly. She had been telling me about a lot of gold which her husband had bought from a Californian, and had afterward discovered that it had been stolen, and they were asking my advice about it. I told them they had better return it, and they said that as they had paid a high price for it and the man was gone, they thought it no more than right that they should keep it."

"But she spoke about it being traced by the police, did she not, Mrs. Hoffman?"

"Yes; she said it had been traced by the police, but as she had it in the room there, she was certain they would never find it. I was very much afraid, but just then her husband came in and said that they would get it out at once."

"Did you see any gold in the place?"

"No, sir; and I am confident now that they had none."

"What could have been their motive for telling you such a thing, do you imagine?"

"For the purpose of putting me off for some money they owe me."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE TELL-TALE TAG.

THAD was naturally surprised at the discovery he had made, but from what he had seen of the remarkable woman thus far, he was ready to credit her with almost anything.

"She is a remarkable woman," he could not avoid uttering at this point.

"She is a remarkable woman," coincided Mrs. Hoffman. "And it was not until yesterday that I was aware that she had been in the habit of exercising her talent for vicious purposes."

"You have known her some time, then?"

"Since last year only. I met them in Paris, where she had some pictures on exhibition in the Salon."

"She is really an artist, then?"

"Oh, yes; and a very good one, I believe, and was at one time very wealthy, but this husband of hers, who, by the way, is a real nobleman, has run through with about all she has and got her into no end of trouble."

"Do you know anything about the man, Folger—Silas Folger?"

"Yes, he is Mrs. Murdoch's brother. There is something strange about him, as well as Mrs. Murdoch. He is foolishly devoted to Murdoch, although the latter detests him and has threatened to kill him several times, I understand."

"How long have these people had your studio?"

"About three months."

"And you say they left yesterday?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have they removed everything?"

"Yes, everything was taken away this morning."

"Do you know where they went?"

"I do not, although they said they were going somewhere in New Jersey."

"Have you any objection to my looking about the studio a little? Something may have been left which will yield a clue to their present whereabouts."

"Certainly not," replied the lady. "If there is anything here that will assist you to find them you are welcome to find it, and I shall take pleasure in assisting you as much as I can."

"You are very kind," responded Thad, politely. "But I will not trouble you except to take a little of your time in waiting till I am through with my investigation."

"I have no objection to waiting if it will not take too long," she answered.

"I shall not detain you more than half-an-hour."

"Very well. I will wait."

Burr then set about searching the place for some scrap of paper or some other trifle which might serve to throw some light on the intended destination of the strange pair who had recently occupied the studio.

The place had not been swept or cleaned since their furniture and other things had been removed, and the floor was considerably littered with papers.

These were picked up one by one and examined and thrown in a heap in order that they might not come in the way a second time.

It was a tedious task, but the detective's work was frequently tedious, and he was possessed of remarkable patience.

More than half an hour passed, and still he had not completed his task, and the lady began to lose patience.

"Will you soon be through?" she asked several times.

"Very soon now," he would answer, and hurry on with his work.

Three-quarters, and then an hour went by, and the woman began to pace the floor.

Thad saw her impatience to get away, and said:

"Perhaps I had better leave the rest of it for another time, although it will take but a few minutes more now."

"I hope you will defer the rest till morning," she answered impatiently.

"Very well; I shall do so."

And he arose from the stooping posture in which he had been prosecuting the search, to join the woman in the studio proper—he was in the alcove hitherto alluded to—when he noticed a bit of manila paper crumpled into a wad and tossed into a corner.

He picked it up mechanically and brought it along with him, and when he reached the woman's side, he opened the paper and examined it.

It proved to be a tag or label, such as are commonly used in shipping goods, and it appeared to solve the whole problem!

It bore an address, which the detective believed to be the one to which the fugitives had gone, and the reason for its having been thrown aside seemed to have been because it had been blurred in the writing.

"This is what I was looking for after all," declared the detective exultantly. "This solves the problem, unless I am very much mistaken."

"What is it?" asked the woman eagerly.

"Look!" he answered, handing her the crumpled label.

"West Fourteenth street?" she mused, reading the label. "I wonder why they have gone over there? They said they were going to New Jersey."

"That was only to put you off the trail, in case you wanted to lock them up."

"Perhaps."

"Did they not tell you whereabouts in New Jersey they were going—to what town?"

"No, sir. I think she said that they were not sure themselves yet, and that she would let me know."

"You say they owe you money?"

"Yes."

"Very much?"

"No, not a great deal."

"Enough to make it an object to follow them up?"

"Hardly."

"If they claimed to have the gold in the room there, why did they not offer to repay you out of the gold?"

"They did make the offer."

"And you rejected it?"

"I told them I would prefer the paper to gold which might possibly be taken away from me."

"Did they show you the gold?"

"No, and that is why I do not believe they had it."

"If they had any, it was spurious, you may depend upon it. Did you see anything of a peculiar-shaped bag which they claimed the gold was in?"

"I did not."

Burr took his leave, and late as it was, went to the number indicated in the label in West Fourteenth street, which he found to be a tenement-house of a fairly respectable appearance. Indeed, it was one of the few modern-built houses in the neighborhood, the majority being of the tumble-down order and occupied by the poorest and vilest of tenants.

The vestibule door was already closed for the night and he could not see the names on the letter-box, so he sought the janitor.

Yes, a new family had moved in that day, but their name was Welsh.

"What kind of looking people are they?" asked the detective.

"Very respectable," replied the janitor.

"But can you describe them?"

"Wal, the mon is quite ould, if gray hairs an' whiskers goes fer anything, an' he's a big fella. Lucks loike a goint."

"And the woman?"

"She's younger, wid black hair an' eyes that black that yez'd think the divvil was behoid aich av thim."

"No children, I suppose?"

"Nivver a wan."

"Have they any visitors?"

"Not that Oi've seen, but a little fella lives wid thim."

"What sort of a little fellow?"

"A mon, but he's a shmall little fella, bechune the soize av a b'ye an' a mon."

"What is his name?"

"Faix, Oi'll nivver tell yez, though Oi think he's some kin to the missus."

"That will do."

Thad was a little perplexed at this piece of information.

The description of the woman and Folger tallied perfectly with those two worthies, but who could the old man be? And what had become of Murdoch?

These perplexing questions kept seething in the detective's brain as he made his way homeward, and he realized that he had only begun to solve the problem he was working on.

If this old man described by the janitor was the same as the one representing himself as the Californian, then his theory about the old fellow being mixed up with the gold-brick swindle was correct.

But what worried him most was the fact that Murdoch, who was the head of the whole business, appeared to have disappeared.

The following day he proposed to pay a visit to the flat and ascertain the facts.

CHAPTER XIX.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

THE following day, disguised in such a manner as to resemble an artist, with long hair and pointed beard, Burr called at the flat of "Mrs. Welsh."

The lady received him courteously, and when he revealed to her the fact that he was in hard luck and great need of money, she expressed great sympathy and promised to assist him.

The alleged artist refused to accept anything unless she would give him something to do to repay her, and she promised to let him finish some pictures which she had begun, if he proved to be as good an artist as he claimed to be.

She insisted upon his accepting ten dollars as a temporary loan, however, which he finally consented to do, and put the money into his pocket.

In the course of the conversation he managed to inquire about the private life of the woman herself.

"You are a widow, are you not?" he asked, in a sympathetic voice.

"Yes," she replied. "My husband is dead."

"You live here alone, then?"

"Not quite. My brother and an uncle live with me."

"Oh. The uncle is the old gentleman I saw leaving the house just before I came up."

She looked at him in surprise.

"You could not have seen him leaving this morning," she observed, "for he went away yesterday."

"Oh, then I was mistaken. Has he left the city?"

"No. At least I do not believe he has, but to tell you the truth, I do not know exactly where he has gone."

"I imagine I must have seen your brother—a small man—this morning."

"I hardly think you did, for he has left the city for a few days."

Thad began to grow nervous.

It was not often that he guessed so badly, and he began to think he was losing his cunning in that direction.

However, he concluded to venture one more guess.

"Who is the tall, dark man I met in the hall?" he asked, innocently. "I thought he had been visiting you."

The woman looked at him and scowled darkly.

"I know of no such person," she snapped.

"He may belong in some of the other flats. But why all this catechising? Have you come here to learn all about my private affairs?"

"I beg a thousand pardons!" cried the pretended artist, bowing abjectly. "I was altogether too inquisitive. But it is a weakness of mine."

His apologies, however, were useless. The woman's feelings were ruffled and no amount of apologizing would suffice to smooth them, and she showed plainly that she would be pleased to have him take his leave as soon as possible.

So he took the hint and departed.

Thad was far from satisfied with this interview, although he had assured himself as to the fact of the woman being there, so that he could put his hand on her when she was wanted.

But the whereabouts of Murdoch was the most important matter, and that was still an unsolved problem, and appeared likely to remain so for some time to come.

Returning home, he was surprised to meet the old man who had represented himself as Earnest Maynard's father. He was on the point of ringing the door-bell when the detective came up.

The old man did not recognize Thad in his disguise, and, merely bestowing a glance upon him, muttered:

"I was about calling upon the detective. Do you know him?"

"He is a friend of mine," replied the artist. "Let us go in. I am sure he will be glad to see you."

With that, Thad put his key into the lock, and, opening the door, invited the old man to enter.

He did so, but his face wore a puzzled look at the unaccountable freedom of the artist.

Thad saw his consternation, and hastened to explain.

"You see, the detective and I are such close friends that I am not required to practice the formalities of ordinary visitors. Come in."

And he led the way back to the detective's private office.

"Be seated," he continued, after closing the door and taking a seat himself. "Mr. Burr doesn't appear to be in just now, but I will take the liberty of making you welcome until he comes."

The old man was silent for some time, and sat, as on the previous of his visits, with his slouch hat on his head.

Finally the pretended artist broke the silence:

"Is your business with the detective anything of great importance, sir?"

"Yes, sir; of vital importance," replied the old man.

"Of a secret nature, I presume?"

"Yes, it is."

"Because," pursued the detective, "I have the most profound secrets of Mr. Burr. He confides everything to me, and if there is anything I can do for you, I shall be only too glad to do it."

"You are very kind," interposed the old man, eying the artist keenly, "but the nature of my business is such that I prefer to confide it to no one except the detective himself."

"Oh, very well. He will soon be here, I presume."

Another silence followed, and then Thad said:

"That was a strange affair over at the Forty-second street hotel the other night, wasn't it?"

The old man stared at him with a puzzled expression, and finally replied:

"You refer to the robbery?"

"Yes. The robbery of the old Californian."

"Yes, that was a strange affair, and I—"

"The strange thing about it," interrupted Thad, "is that those who know the most about the matter are inclined to believe it a big hoax."

"What!" gasped the old man.

"That is the opinion of those who are on the inside, and ought to know, and that is Mr. Burr's opinion, I believe."

"Then he is wrong," rejoined the old man in a husky voice. "He is entirely wrong; so is everybody else who imagines the affair a hoax."

"You know something about it, then?"

"I ought to. I am the man who was robbed."

"Oh!" exclaimed Thad with well-feigned surprise. "In that case, you ought to know all about it."

"I think I should."

"And yet it seems funny that when Mr. Burr traced the gold to an East Side hotel, and from there to a studio up-town, it finally turned out that the gold had never been in either place, while the thieves were using the report of the theft for the purpose of gulling simple people into purchasing spurious gold bricks."

"If this is all the detective has been able

to discover he may as well stop on where he is," interposed the old man indignantly, rising to take his departure.

"Oh, he may have done more than this," interjected the pretended artist promptly. "Hold on a bit. Perhaps he is about the place. I'll go and see."

But it was no use. The old man's temper was up, and he would wait to hear or see no more, and rushed from the house.

It was lively work, but the detective had completely changed his disguise, so that any one seeing him as the artist would never have guessed it to be the same man, in time to sight the old man before he had gained two blocks from the house.

He was walking briskly toward Eighth avenue and Thad was not far behind when he reached that street, where the old man stopped to wait for a car.

Burr guessed readily where he was bound for, but to make sure, stopped on the opposite corner and took the same car, which was going down-town.

The old fellow, who had taken a seat directly opposite to him, never entertained the slightest suspicion that he was the "artist" with whom he had been conversing a few minutes before.

As Thad supposed he would do, the old chap got off at Fourteenth street and walked west for a couple of blocks, until he came to the tenement-house where the detective had seen the woman, and entered.

Thad was directly behind him, and as the door was not locked, followed him into the hall; and, allowing him time to get up-stairs, the shadower also ascended.

Burr put his ear to the keyhole and listened, but could hear nothing. He then walked to the other end of the hall, where he found a bath-room. The door was open and he went in and locked the door behind him.

There was but a thin partition between this and one of the rooms of the flat. With a wonderful instrument he always carried, he soon had a hole through this wall. Putting his eye to the hole, he was astonished at what he saw.

CHAPTER XX.

WHAT THE DETECTIVE SAW.

WHAT Burr saw when he put his eye to the hole he had made through the wall not only confirmed the theory he had had about this old man being implicated in the crimes of the strange pair he had first encountered on the bridge, but it did more.

It astonished him beyond anything he had ever run across in all his career as a detective.

The old man had just entered the room into which the detective was looking, which appeared to be a bedchamber, and the tall woman was with him.

The old man was greatly agitated, evidently over what the detective had told him; and he and the woman were talking in an excited tone.

"I tell you," he was saying, "that in spite of all your cunning, we are done for. This detective has already discovered the fraud, and it won't take him long to discover our hiding-place."

"How do you know this, dear?" questioned the woman, with more gentleness in her voice than Thad could have given her credit for.

"How do I know?" snarled the man. "I have just had a talk with him, and he told me all about it!"

This was a poser for the detective.

The old man had been keener than he had supposed, then, and knew him in spite of his disguise!

"He was disguised with long hair and a pointed beard," pursued the old man, "but I knew him—knew him by his eyes, as well as his voice. But that wasn't the worst of it."

"What then, dear?"

"He recognized me."

What did he mean? mused Thad.

Surely the old man had given him credit for more than he deserved in this connection, and the detective waited breathlessly for further revelations.

"Are you sure?" asked the woman.

"Positive."

"How do you know? Did he tell you he knew you?"

"No; but I knew from what he said to me and the way in which he looked at me."

Then came the revelation which caused Thad's greatest astonishment.

Up to this time the old man had kept his hat on, as he usually did on all occasions, but now he took it off. Nor was that all.

He followed the action by taking off a gray wig, revealing a head of hair as black as jet.

He next removed a gray beard, and immediately afterward proceeded to wash the white composition out of his mustache and eyebrows.

The task was soon completed, and when it was done, Casper Murdoch in his true personality was the result!

In all his experience with sharpers, this was Thad's greatest surprise, and he felt absolutely stupid at the thought of having been so cleverly hoodwinked.

"What do you propose doing now?" asked the woman.

"Get out of here," growled the man.

"We must not remain here another day."

"Where shall you go?"

"Anywhere. To Europe or across the continent to California."

"But, don't you realize that it will be vastly more difficult to leave the city without discovery than to conceal ourselves here?"

"Not if we are properly disguised."

"If this detective saw through the other disguise, which was certainly an excellent one, don't you think he will see through any other which you may adopt?"

"Not the one I have in view now. The trouble with the other, while it was an excellent one as far as it went, was that it was too conspicuous. Any detective with half an eye would suspect something in a man with that disguise on."

"What are you going to adopt now, dear?"

"Wait a moment and I'll show you."

The man then left the room, and presently returned with a bag, from which he took a number of articles and laid them on the dresser in front of him.

He next took a palette with a lot of colors on it out of the drawer and proceeded to stain his face to a rich olive similar to the complexion of a South American. The color corresponded excellently with his dark eyes and jet eyebrows, but he was not satisfied with this, which would have prevented his recognition with nine people out of ten, but he added a black beard, close-cropped and curly, to his face, and followed this by putting on a wig of exceedingly curly hair.

The effect was marvelous.

His best friends would not have known him, and Thad, who was an artist in the line of making up, could not help but envy this cleverest of rivals. Still, he could not avoid admiring him, and experienced a sense of regret that he should so soon be compelled to cut short the career of such an artist.

"What do you think of that?" he questioned, turning upon his wife.

"It is wonderful!" she exclaimed. "I could not have imagined it possible, even with you."

"Do you think the detective, clever as he is, will see through this disguise?"

"Never in the world!"

"Well, now that I am made up, I must make you up, and we will prepare to decamp."

"Going to make me up too?" laughed the woman.

"Certainly. Even if he should fail to recognize me, he will you, and that will ruin everything."

"What are you going to make of me?"

"I'll show you."

And he at once set to work upon her face. Twenty minutes passed, and the work was completed, and the woman must have been astonished at her own image in the glass.

She resembled a beautiful South American woman, fully ten years younger than she had formerly appeared, and no one would have recognized her.

"Now for our plans," said the man.

"Yes, what are they?" she asked eagerly.

"The United States Minister from Cuba is a friend of mine, and he is to leave for Washington to night. I have had a talk with him, and informed him that I was in trouble—I did not state the nature, of course—and the

result is that I am to accompany him to Washington, as his private secretary."

"But will not the detectives trace you to Washington?"

"They may in time, but we shall only remain in Washington a week, when we will go to Havana with the minister. Once there, we are safe in spite of all the cunning of all the detectives in the United States combined."

"This is a brilliant stroke, Casper, and eminently worthy of you. You have given me a good deal of credit for cunning, but this beats anything of mine."

"No, it is no more brilliant a stroke than the two-hundred-thousand-dollar robbery, which was your scheme, my dear."

"That wasn't bad," she laughed with evident pride at her achievement.

"It certainly was not, and has resulted in my accumulation of nearly that amount of real money, which will enable us to live in good style in Cuba for a long time."

"What time does the minister go to Washington?" asked his wife.

"He will take the nine o'clock train. It is now a quarter to seven," he went on, consulting his watch, "so that we shall have none too much time."

"Neither will I," thought the detective, unlocking the bath-room door and slipping out into the hall. "I will have just about time enough to get around and secure a warrant for this fellow, which I can do on the ground that he is about to jump his bail."

Thad lost no time in getting out of the building, which he succeeded in doing without being seen, and, taking a hack, had himself driven to the residence of the police justice who had accepted the fellow's bail-bonds.

His story was soon related, and the judge, alive to the interests of justice, soon had a warrant made out for the rearrest of Casper Murdoch for attempting to jump his bail.

Five minutes later Thad was again in the cab, and driving with all speed toward the residence of Inspector Williams.

Once more the story of his discovery was gone over, to which the inspector listened with great interest.

"We were a little out of the way in our theory, after all, were we not, Thad?" admitted the inspector, at the conclusion.

"Yes, but it was through working upon your theory that I struck the right trail, nevertheless."

"Well, what can I do for you, old man?"

"Go with me and see the final round-up."

"Nothing could suit me better," cried Williams, rising hastily. "I shall be ready in a minute."

And ten minutes later the great detective and the equally great inspector were in the cab and driving toward the Jersey City Depot, where they expected to make the capture.

CHAPTER XXI.

A SURPRISE PARTY.

Burr and the inspector reached the depot several minutes before train-time, and proceeded to stroll about the great waiting-room in the hope of seeing the game.

It will be remembered that Thad was still disguised, so that he entertained no fear of recognition from his man should the latter see him, while there was no fear on account of Williams, as the fellow would probably not recognize him, and if he did, he would not imagine the inspector was after him.

Time wore on, and the hour for the departure of the Washington train had almost arrived, and yet the would-be fugitives had not put in an appearance.

Thad began to grow nervous, and even the inspector was a trifle uneasy lest Thad's scheme should miscarry.

"It would be a fine joke on us if the fellow should conclude to take some other route," suggested the detective.

"What other way could he go?" questioned Williams.

"Oh, there are two other routes to Washington. And, for that matter they might drive out to Newark in a hack and take the train there. It is not an uncommon dodge, and would be just like the cunning of this villain."

"That is true, if he is as keen as you say he is, which I have no doubt of. But—"

"Merciful Moses!" and Thad clutched the inspector's arm convulsively.

"It's our game!" exclaimed the detective rapturously. "Now for a surprise party!"

"Haven't you forgotten something in your haste. Thad?" asked Williams.

"What?" and Thad turned a little pale.

"You forgot to get a warrant for the woman, I'll bet a good cigar, and she's as guilty as he, from what you say."

"I'll take you on the cigar," smiled Thad, his spirits rising again. "I never forget trifles like that. I've had too much trouble with that woman in the last few days to forget a thing like that."

"Well, here they are," interrupted Williams. "Will you arrest them now, or wait until they get inside the train?"

"I'll wait till they take their seats in the train, so that they can have no excuse. They might plead that they had come to see some one off, you know."

Meanwhile Murdoch and his wife and the Cuban Minister had entered the gate and were approaching the train.

Burr stepped up to the gate-keeper and showed his badge.

"I have business aboard the out-going train," he explained, "and this is Inspector Williams who is with me."

"Pass right in," replied the polite guard.

By this time the three people had entered the sleeper which stood a short distance away, and Thad had kept his eye upon them to see which car they had entered.

"Now is our time, inspector," said Thad, leading the way and making a bee-line for the sleeper.

As they entered the door of the sleeper the detective espied his pair just taking their seats some distance down the aisle. He walked along in a unconcerned way, as though looking for his berth, until he came opposite the three people, the minister, Murdoch and his wife, when he suddenly turned and drawing the two warrants from his pocket, said, in a low, firm voice:

"Casper Murdoch, in the name of the law, I arrest you on a charge of attempting to escape justice by fleeing the country, when you are already under bond pending a trial on a charge of practicing fraud and obtaining money under false pretenses; and, Miranda Murdoch, I arrest you on the charge of complicity in the same crime."

Now was the time for these two arch dissemblers to do their most artistic work in the line of acting.

Was there any indication of agitation on the part of either of them?

Not the least!

If the detective had been the conductor asking them for their fare they could not have treated his words with more indifference.

Murdoch looked up languidly, arched his brows and shrugged his shoulders and drawled:

"Were you addressing your remarks to me, my good man?"

"Yes, sir, to you!" returned Thad, in a severe tone.

"What was it I understood you to say you wished?"

"I wish you to come with me, and I want no dallying about it, either!" was Thad's stern reply.

"I am very sorry, sir," said the other, coolly, "but I will be unable to comply with your wish. The fact is, you have made a mistake. You are evidently looking for some one else."

"No, sir, I have made no mistake, Mr. Murdoch! Don't imagine because you have got on that disguise that I do not know you."

"You are certainly laboring under a mistake when you address me by that name. My name is Cardoza, and I am a citizen of Cuba. If you doubt my word, I call this gentleman to witness what I say. He is the Cuban Minister, and his word ought to be worth something."

Meanwhile the face of the Cuban was a study.

Thad had rarely witnessed a more thoroughly exaggerated expression of surprise on a human visage.

He appeared to be unable to comprehend how a man could sit there and coolly utter such a falsehood!

But the climax of the gold-brick swindler's

audacity was reached when, in addition to appealing to him in a general way, he turned to him for substantiation of the lie he had just uttered.

Murdoch as a swindler was unapproachable, but in "cheek" he was simply sublime. It was all too much for the high-minded Cuban.

He shook his head and replied in very broken English:

"Pardon, senior, you ask too much. I cannot tell a lie even for a friend. You are not what you represent. You are what ze gentleman have say—Senior Murdoch. Go wiz ze offisaire. I have done wiz you!"

This was uttered in the quietest way, but it was easy to be seen that the gentleman was very much disgusted with his false friend.

It was not till now that the swindler lost his nerve.

He turned pale in spite of the rouge on his face, and began to tremble violently.

But it was only for an instant; the succeeding one he had regained his composure.

He imagined he saw a good-sized loophole out of the dilemma, for he said in the coolest manner possible:

"Where was this warrant issued, my good fellow?"

"It was issued in New York," replied the detective, "but that will afford you no satisfaction, for, as you may see, it is in the shape of a United States warrant, and is serviceable anywhere in the United States. Will you come with me peaceably, or shall I call in assistance and take you by force?"

Murdoch reflected a moment. He realized that he was at the end of his row, and after a short whispered consultation with his wife, he arose and said:

"I will go with you. Come, Miranda!"

The couple were marched from the train, placed in the hack which the detective had brought over the ferry for the purpose, and all were driven aboard of the ferry.

Murdoch maintained a stolid and sullen silence until they had reached the New York side; then he turned to the detective and, after surveying him for some time, asked:

"Are you Mr. Burr, the detective who has been on my track all this time?"

"I am," replied Thad, calmly.

"I thought I recognized your voice, although I should never have known you in that disguise. You're a pretty clever chap, and I admire you for your genius, but how the deuce came you to recognize me in this make-up? I was just congratulating myself that nobody would recognize me, as I considered the make-up the best I have ever executed."

"It is an excellent make-up, I must admit," replied Thad, "and while we are on the subject of compliments, allow me to congratulate you on a great achievement in a line in which I take some pride in being an expert myself. But I deserve no credit for seeing through your disguise."

"What!"

"Not the least in the world."

"What do you mean?"

"I saw you make up, otherwise I do not believe I should have recognized you."

"You astound me."

"No doubt, but it is true, nevertheless."

"How could that be? I made up in my bedroom at home, and I am positive no one except my wife saw me."

"You should never be too positive. Even the walls have eyes as well as ears. You did not know it, but I was in your bathroom when you executed that make-up, and there was a hole through the wall."

"The deuce you say!"

And the fellow fell into a dogged silence from which he did not emerge until they reached the Tombs Prison, where the prisoners were locked up.

Having jailed the two principals, Burr considered his work about done.

There was something more to be done, however.

In the first place, Folger, who appeared to be almost if not quite as guilty as Murdoch and his wife, was still at large, and it was important that she should be caught, lest he, too, should attempt to jump his bail.

Then there was the organization which was back of the rascals.

It was highly important that its membership should be discovered and brought to justice.

There was little hope that either Murdoch or his wife would ever divulge the secret, but there was hope that Folger, could he be caught, would do so.

So on leaving the Tombs that night Thad did not rest until he had procured a warrant for Folger's re-arrest.

Having accomplished this, he started home, determining to scour the town the following day for the remaining members of the gang.

As he got off the car within half a block of his house the detective noticed a small man walking in front of him, and there was something in the short, mincing gait that seemed strangely familiar to him.

Increasing his own pace, he was soon up with the little man, when the latter turned and glanced at Thad, and the detective saw at once that it was Folger.

Of course he did not recognize the detective in his disguise, and the latter affected not to know him.

Burr kept along near the little man, and gradually dropping a trifle behind.

Thus they continued until the detective's house was reached, when, to Thad's surprise, the little man turned toward the gate as if about to enter.

Burr allowed him to get inside the fence, and then opened the gate.

The fellow was about to ring the bell at the moment, but hesitated and glanced back at the detective.

"Is this where Detective Burr lives?" asked the little man, in a quiet tone.

"I believe it is," replied Thad.

"I wonder if he is at home?" pursued the other, hesitatingly.

"He soon will be," rejoined the detective.

"Ah, you don't mean to say—?"

"Yes," interrupted Thad, "I am the man I guess you are looking for."

By this time he had put the key in the door and opened it.

"Come in," he said, holding the door for the little man.

The latter entered without speaking, after which Burr closed the door and, starting toward his private office at the rear of the hall, said:

"Come this way, please."

When they were seated in the little office, the detective said:

"Now, sir, what do you want to see me about?"

The little man hesitated a moment, and then replied:

"My name is Folger, as you probably know, and I have come to give myself up. I see that you have captured Murdoch and his wife, and I can give some information with regard to their operations which may be of value to you."

"What is your object in surrendering yourself?" asked Thad curiously. "Did you think that it would only be a matter of time, now that the head of the gang is in limbo, before you would share his fate also?"

"Not exactly that," returned the little man. "You know that I am out on bail now, and you would have no right to arrest me unless, like Murdoch, I should attempt to leave town, but I want you to understand that I am not as bad a man as you think."

"In other words, you have been dragged into this affair through your friends."

"That is it. Up to the time I met Murdoch I was an honest man. Through his extravagance not only my sister's fortune, but mine was squandered, and as a means of restoring our money he persuaded me to go into this business. He had a great many friends among influential and well-to-do business men, and these—or many of them—were persuaded to go into the organization, the existence of which I believe you have already discovered."

"Yes, I have learned a good deal about this organization, although I have as yet found out but a few of its members, aside from Murdoch and yourself."

"It was with a view to given you a complete list of the membership that I came here to-night."

"You have a complete list, then?"

"I have," rejoined the other, drawing out a paper. "Take this," he went on, handing the paper to the detective. "It will enable

you to procure the arrest of the entire organization."

Thad took the document and glanced it over hurriedly. He saw that the list included some of the most reputable—so-called—men in town.

"You had a pretty strong organization," mused Burr at last. "Don't you know, then, that in exposing them you lay yourself liable to trouble?"

"I realize that," answered the other bitterly. "At the same time I know that if you do your duty, as I have no doubt you will, there will remain nobody at liberty to molest me."

"And I presume you hope that by turning state's evidence you will be acquitted?"

"I should think I ought, don't you?"

"Possibly," returned Thad dryly, "but I cannot vouch for the action of the court."

CHAPTER XXII. THE EXPOSURE.

At Folger's own request, he was taken to the Tombs and locked up, but he had solemnly enjoined the detective not to mention the fact of his exposure to Murdoch and the rest of the gang.

The following morning Thad called upon Inspector Williams and showed him the list of names comprising the membership of the organization.

The inspector studied the paper with knitted brows for some moments, and then gave vent to a long whistle.

"Well!" he ejaculated at length, "this is about the richest haul we have made yet, Thad!"

"Some pretty prominent names there, eh, inspector?" rejoined the detective.

"I should say so. But there is one thing that puzzles me."

"What is that?"

"Have we evidence enough against these men to warrant us in arresting them?"

"I'm afraid not," mused Thad with a troubled brow. "I'm afraid we would have some difficulty in getting any justice to issue warrants on the unsupported testimony of this man, who confesses himself to be a scoundrel."

"You are right, and the only thing for us to do is to wait till the trial of these principals comes on, and then allow this Folger to testify."

"Yes, and possibly we may be able to induce Murdoch and his wife to verify the fellow's statement."

"Or what is better," observed Williams, after some reflection, "induce him to tell where the books of the organization are. They must have books in a concern of such gigantic proportions."

"They must have, and the discovery of them might frighten some of the others to turn state's evidence. In the mean time I think I shall call at the Tombs this afternoon, and have a talk with Murdoch, and show him this list."

"That will be an excellent idea," returned the inspector. "You may be able to cause him to weaken and make a confession."

"I hope so, and shall use my best efforts with him."

"When will you go?"

"Some time this afternoon."

"That will do well. Let him rest and have a chance to reflect a little, and he will be all the more easily handled. Give him to understand that Folger has peached, and then when he sees that you are in possession of all these facts, he is made of different stuff to what I think he is if he don't weaken."

Casper Murdoch maintained a remarkable degree of indifference and even cheerfulness until late in the afternoon of the day following his arrest and incarceration.

The reason was that he had had implicit faith in the organization to which he belonged to bail him out again, when he expected to flee the country.

But, late in the afternoon, he was favored with a visit from his lawyer, who had exhausted every means of securing the prisoner's release, and was compelled to return to the prison at last with the report of his complete failure.

Inspector Williams, taking Thad's advice, had seen all the police justices and prevailed upon them, in the face of the fact that Murdoch had already attempted to escape, to refuse all bail for him.

This left nothing for the cunning fellow but to lie in prison and await his trial, which he knew must result in his conviction.

It was not until then that he completely broke down and gave himself up to the venting of his spleen on those whom he had expected would help him out of his trouble.

While he was in this humor Burr visited the prison and had a talk with the artful swindler and cunningest of crooks.

For a long time the fellow would answer no questions.

At length, however, he showed an inclination to talk.

"It was all your fault, and those members of the brotherhood!" he began. "You are the cleverest detective I ever encountered, but you would have been powerless if those fellows had done their duty, and now I shall have my revenge by exposing the whole lot of them."

Then he proceeded to enumerate a lot of hitherto respected citizens, who, he claimed, were members of the brotherhood.

After he had got through, and the detective had taken down the names of the alleged members, the latter asked:

"What was the object of such men as these belonging to a society of this character?"

"Profit, of course," was the response.

"In the seven or eight years during which the society has been in existence several millions of dollars have been procured by myself and a few others who have done the dangerous work and divided among these men. Why, some of them have been saved from bankruptcy through the organization, and others have built elegant homes out of the proceeds, and all they have had to do to earn it was to go on our bail bond when we got into trouble. But here I am, who earned it all by exposing myself to the danger of arrest and imprisonment, allowed to go to prison like a common felon, while they enjoy the proceeds of their ill-gotten wealth. It is enough to drive a man mad!"

"But will you be able to prove your assertion in regard to these men?"

"No, of course not, and that is what galls me. No one will take the word of a professional swindler against a respectable man, so-called, and I shall be put down as a liar and villain, while they will be looked upon as martyrs."

"How did you ever come to go into this business? You were once a respectable and honorable man, I understand."

"I don't know but I may as well tell you. It can do me no good to keep the secret any longer now."

He then paused for some moments, and appeared to be going over his career in his own mind, while his face was a study.

"Ten years ago I was an honest man. Wild and reckless, but no man could lay aught dishonorable to my charge. I am the youngest son of an earl, and, like all younger sons, I possessed a title and no money. Then it was that I met my wife, who was a Miss Folger. She was thirty years old and not particularly handsome, but rich. Well, I wanted money, and decided to marry her."

"For some time we lived in good style, but my extravagance was too much for her wealth and it finally vanished. I was done with her, then, of course, but it seemed she really loved me, and more still, my title, and proposed to work and support us. She had studied art and achieved some fame as an amateur artist; so she set to work painting pictures, which she sold and I spent the proceeds."

"This was in Paris. Our way of living in that city was too much for her earnings, although they were considerable, and we concluded to come to New York. Here we did pretty well for awhile, but we were constantly hampered for want of means, and I at length decided to do a little in the way of earning myself."

"My first efforts were expended in Wall street, where I succeeded in wasting about all the money my wife could earn, and I became disheartened."

"I was constantly reading of the exploits of bunco men and green-goods men, and at length thought I could do something in that line myself. I had been disgusted with the apparent stupidity of these fellows in allowing themselves to be caught every once in a while, and believed that I could do better."

"I had several friends among Wall street brokers who, like myself, had been either unsuccessful or only partially so, and one night when a party of us were together I sprung the idea of the organization of a society for mutual assistance upon them."

"The scheme was to subscribe a large amount of stock, enough to cover all contingencies, which was to be used in bailing out any of the workers, or militant men, as we called them, or assisting them to get out of the country if necessary."

"At first there were several workers, but they were a clumsy lot for the most part, and we kept gradually dropping them off the list until the working force at length became reduced to myself, my wife and my brother-in-law Folger."

"For a long time we worked the green-goods game, but that finally grew stale. The yaps got on to us, to use a professional phrase, and we took up the gold-brick game."

"Has that been successful?"

"Successful? It has been a regular bonanza! You have no idea, detective as you are, what sums have flowed into our coffers through this business."

"Every one is not reported, then?"

"Every one? I should say that not one case in ten ever comes to the ears of the police. You see, when a chap goes into this he does so because he thinks he is getting a good deal for next to nothing, and the fellows who go into it are what are commonly termed 'smart Alecks'—that is, men who pride themselves on their cunning, men who are willing to make a dollar without much care whether the means are honest or otherwise. Those are the chaps we count on, and the woods are full of them. There is a phrase among blacklegs that there is a fool born every minute, but the phrase is incorrect. It should be, 'a thief is born every minute,' for no really honest man was ever caught either on a green-goods game or a gold-brick game in this world."

"What did your wife think of the business?"

"It nearly broke her heart, poor thing, at first, but she finally became reconciled to it, and proved toward the last one of the cunningest operators we had."

"You say Folger was in it, too?"

"Yes, he was one of us, but it will be hard to prove anything against him, for he always managed to keep himself in the background, being the greatest coward in the world. You saw me knock him down on the bridge that night?"

"Yes," replied Thad, "and I thought you had stabbed him."

"I should have done so if my wife had not interfered. She knew that I had it in my mind to kill the cur, and she followed us that night. And if it had not been for you I should have finished her, too."

"You may thank me then, that you will only serve a term in the Penitentiary instead of going to the electric-chair."

"I have no thanks in that direction. One is as acceptable as the other with me now."

"You do not entertain a very high regard for your wife, then?"

"On the contrary, I have grown to hate her, as I do every other individual on God's green earth. I have no business to entertain any enmity against her, for she has certainly done a great deal for me, but to save me from the halter this instant, I could not feel a particle of love for her. If I had I should have managed things differently yesterday. I had a premonition that I had turned my last card, and I was bound that when I went over the road she should go with me. It was for that reason I had her wear my seal ring, hoping she might be identified by it."

"Well, sir," observed Thad, when the fellow had concluded his story, "I must congratulate you on one thing, aside from your cunning and art in making up, and that is, in being the cruelest, most heartless wretch whom I have ever encountered in all my experience as a detective."

"Thanks! I deserve it, sir, and take pride in it. Next to your compliment on my art in making up, there is nothing more gratifying to me than being thought the most heartless wretch alive. Good-day."

And the wholly bad man turned away and began to whistle!

Number Forty-seven.

A THRILLING STORY FROM THE EXPERIENCE
OF POLICE INSPECTOR ALEXANDER S.
WILLIAMS, AND TAKEN FROM
HIS OWN MEMORANDA.

BY FREDERIC M. DEY.

I.

"NUMBER forty-seven," in a street in the Nineteenth Precinct, had been the cause of great anxiety to its owner for many months.

It was situated in the aristocratic portion of New York, and there was no apparent reason why the house should not be as readily rented as its neighbors.

In point of fact, to let the house was easy enough, but to induce tenants to remain more than a week was an impossibility. The house was richly decorated and invariably pleased the fancy of the would-be tenant who had never heard of the strange spell with which it was shrouded; of the inexplicable noises and uncertain shadows with which it was infested; of the cries and shrieks, the groans and murmurings, the white-robed figures that flitted through its halls, opening locked doors, shivering panes of glass in the windows of the upper stories, and performing all sorts of uncanny tricks, which were calculated to fill an observer with superstitious terrors.

The owner of the house had absolutely no faith in ghosts, and he was, therefore, very slow to believe that his property was haunted.

When, however, tenant after tenant left him—when it became impossible to induce persons to remain in the house longer than a few days, he was forced to face the question point-blank.

The last tenant had been a physician who had heard through a patient of the strange sights and sounds that infested the place, and with a full knowledge of what he had to expect he sought out Mr. Saunders and secured the house at a ridiculously low rent.

A week later, Mr. Saunders received the following note from his new tenant:

"I left No. 47 yesterday a believer in ghosts. Things were too hot for me. I can stand most things, but 47 beats me. As I took the lease with my eyes open, I will do what is right in the matter of rental, but I should rather pay you five years' rent than remain under that roof five more nights."

Mr. Saunders was in despair.

"There is only one thing left for me to do," he thought, "and that is, to live there myself. I do not believe that ghosts can drive me out of my own house. Not much!"

II.

A WEEK afterward the doctor had moved out and the owner had moved in.

It was in the summer and Mr. Saunders's family had gone to the mountains. He fitted up a room and established himself there about nine o'clock one morning.

At three o'clock on the following morning he leaped from the front door, slammed it behind him and paused upon the pavement to shake his fist at the building. His face was drawn and haggard, and he was a most thoroughly frightened man. A few hours later he took a train for the mountains where his family were staying, and did not return to town for a week. While away, he suddenly had an inspiration.

"I know only one man," he thought, "who cannot be frightened. If anybody can lay the ghosts in that house, Captain Williams is the man. If he cannot do it, by thunder! I'll give it away to somebody."

When he returned to New York, he sought out Captain Williams at once.

"Hallo, Saunders!" exclaimed the captain; "I thought you were out of town."

"So I was; just got back. I say, captain—er—can any one hear what we say here?"

"Not a soul."

"Thanks. Do you believe in ghosts?"

"No; can't say that I do."

"I do."

The captain laughed heartily.

"Fact," persisted Mr. Saunders. "I say, captain, you're the only man in New York

who can help me out, and I have come here to persuade you to do so. Not as an official matter, you know. I should rather you did not touch it than have the facts get to the Department at all. When you are off duty and have nothing else to do, just run around to 47—street and lay the ghost for old friendship's sake, will you? There's the key to the house; keep it as long as you like."

"Hold on! Not so fast. Tell me something about it. What's the matter with the house?"

"Haunted."

"By what?"

"Ghosts."

"Oh! What sort of ghosts?"

"I did not stop to take their census; but they are genuine articles."

"Drive everybody out, eh?"

"Yes—myself included."

"And you want me to investigate?"

"Exactly; but as a friend—not as an officer of the police. If the story should get noised abroad, I could never let or sell the property. If you spend a night in the house, you will either lay the ghosts or they will lay you. I don't believe that they can frighten you away. I thought they could not scare me, but I've changed my views. Captain, if there is such a thing as a devil, he has taken unlawful possession of my property, and nightly holds carnival all over the house. I want you to dispossess him. Will you do it?"

"I'll try."

"Thanks. For old friendship's sake, understand. The police are to know nothing about it. I don't want the sale of my house ruined forever and ever."

"Exactly. Now tell me what you saw there?"

"What did I not see? There was everything that was calculated to horrify. Heads without bodies and bodies without heads; white shrouds, black shrouds, the touches of hands, whispering voices, cries, groans and shrieks. It was fearful. I had two revolvers in my possession and I fired fourteen cartridges through the specters that I saw. They only jeered at me. Once when I fired at a flitting shape it fell with a heavy crash to the floor, uttering a loud groan of agony as it did so."

"I leaped forward, feeling that at last I had found something upon which a bullet would take effect, but when I reached the spot where the body had fallen, nothing was there. Then my courage vanished, and I sprung toward the door, anxious only to get down the stairs and leave the house for good."

"I left the room door unlocked when I entered, I am absolutely sure of that, but the key was turned after I passed through the doorway."

"I turned the key back again, and tried to open the door. Three times I got it open about a foot when it was jerked from my grasp and shut again each time in spite of me. The fourth time I was desperate and pushed with all my strength. That time nothing impeded and the force of my own exertions threw me in upon the floor. I leaped to my feet and rushed through the open door and on into the street, pursued by a shriek of laughter that still rings in my ears. I would not spend another night in that house for all it cost me."

"This is the key, you say?" asked the captain, taking it from the desk where Mr. Saunders had laid it. "Has the property ever been in dispute?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"How long have you owned it?"

"Four years."

"Have you any enemies who would be likely to take this means of frightening you into disposing of it?"

"I think not."

"Has any one ever persistently tried to buy the house since you owned it?"

"Yes; but his offer was ridiculous."

"Who was it?"

"A dark-skinned fellow. I don't remember his name. A foreigner of some kind."

"What price did he offer?"

"About one-third the value—\$20,000."

"How many times did he see you?"

"Once. He sent a representative two or three times, though."

"How long ago was that?"

"Two years, I should say."

"Have you heard from him since?"

"No."

"You do not remember his name?"

"No."

"All right, Saunders; I will see what I can do. The houses next to it are vacant for the summer, I think; people gone into the country?"

"Yes."

"Lucky they weren't there to be disturbed by your fourteen shots. I'll spend a night or two there in the course of the week and let you know the result. Meanwhile, you may rely upon me to keep it quiet."

"Thank you, captain. Good-morning."

III.

It was ten o'clock in the evening when Captain Williams took the key and started for No. 47. He found that the gas could be lighted, and that one room, the front one on the second floor, was furnished. He knew, therefore, that he could examine the house as conveniently in the night as by daylight, and that he would have no difficulty in making himself comfortable there if the "ghost" failed to appear.

The building itself belonged to the best class of New York houses, and the captain glanced curiously around him as he lighted jet after jet of gas until the place was thoroughly illuminated.

"A queer place for ghosts to select," he mused, looking at the frescoed ceiling in admiration. "I always thought that ghosts and rats were akin in their preference for deserted rookeries. Well, if ghosts are here, we must find them and drive them away. This place is far too valuable for their residence."

He began with the basement, and, taking his dark-lantern, passed from room to room, to the top of the house, lighting the gas as he went. Everything seemed to be in perfect order.

"The ghosts may begin now as soon as they please," he said, aloud, taking a last survey of the room where he had completed his tour of investigation.

Then he stepped forward to turn off the gas and found himself in darkness. The lights throughout the house had been extinguished.

"I would give something to be in the cellar this instant," he thought, calmly, not doubting that the gas had been turned off at the main. "The ghosts have begun sooner than I thought, and I may as well begin, too. I wonder if they will leave that gas shut off, or will they turn it on again to drive me out?"

He sniffed suspiciously, but could not detect the smell of gas. Then he started for the lower floor with his lantern. Passing through the door, he had just reached the top of the stairway when he was greatly startled by receiving a stinging slap on the cheek.

The captain wheeled like lightning, bringing his bull's-eye lantern around as he did so, but he saw nothing; nobody but himself was in the hall.

The captain's cheek burned from the force of the blow, and his eyes gleamed savagely as they followed the flash of his lantern from point to point about the hallway.

"That was no ghost's hand," he muttered; "it was altogether too material. It was a small hand, too—more like a woman's than a man's. I—"

Something struck his lantern and nearly knocked it from his hand. Had he been less muscular and his grasp less firm it would have fallen to the floor.

Again he wheeled with lightning quickness, throwing out his disengaged arm as he did so, for he had plainly felt that the hand which struck the lantern had reached toward it and from behind him.

His own hand, however, met the empty air, and the light which he threw around him revealed nothing whatever.

The front door bell jingled at that moment.

"I wonder who it is," mused the captain. "Either the patrolman on this beat noticed the illumination a moment ago or Mr. Saunders has come to keep me company."

He descended the stairs rapidly to the front

door and threw it open. The stoop was vacant.

Leaning forward to look more carefully, he suddenly received a violent push from behind, which would have sent him headlong down the stone steps had not his shoulder struck against the closed half of the door.

"Blessed if they didn't almost put me out of the house bodily!" exclaimed the captain as he regained his equilibrium and drew back into the front hall, closing and chaining the door behind him. "Let me see. I wonder which room is the best in which to have it out with them. The parlor is the largest. I'll try that."

The door had been closed and locked since his inspection. Captain Williams did not hesitate, but raising his foot he burst it from its fastenings.

"They won't lock that again to-night," muttered the captain, who was becoming angry. Then he paused abruptly upon the threshold.

There before him in the center of the large parlor stood a figure robed in white. The glare of his lantern shone full upon it as it floated several inches above the floor.

Even the captain, brave as he was, felt a sense of awe as he gazed upon the apparition. It was not fear that he felt, but wondering doubt. He did not believe in ghosts; therefore the white object before him was not a ghost. Not being a ghost, it was induced by human agency and investigation would solve the mystery.

Calmly he turned the ray of light from his lantern upon the face and body of the figure. It was that of a woman, and she seemed to float in the air her feet being several inches above the floor, while her body swayed slightly. Her face was attractive without being beautiful, and it was as white as the shroud that hung from her shoulders and effectually concealed every other part of her figure.

As the captain examined the phenomenon he cautiously approached nearer, step by step, until he was not more than six feet from the ghost. Gradually, without appearing to do so, he gathered every muscle of his body ready for a leap forward. The moment came when he made the spring, thrusting out his disengaged arm to seize the object before him, knowing that it could not recede quickly enough to avoid his grasp.

Nor did it.

He was conscious that his hand passed completely through the luminous figure, but without actual contact, while the impetus of the jump that he had taken carried him beyond the point where the apparition was floating.

He turned quickly and brought his light around with the same motion, but the woman was gone.

The captain knew that his hand had passed through the figure and he could not help believing that his body had done the same.

For the first time in his life something very much like fear tingled in his nerves and sent a shiver through his flesh as though an icicle had been dropped down his back.

But it was for an instant only.

"Whew!" he muttered, the ghost came very near being too much for me that time, but I won't run, and I'm not even hurt, so far."

IV.

At that moment a low, moaning sound came from the hallway, but the captain did not pursue it. He was more than ever satisfied that he was being made the victim of some expert trickster notwithstanding the fact that he still felt a creeping sensation of aversion when he remembered the ghostly shape through which he had thrust his hand without effort or contact.

"Keep it up," he thought, "but if your ghostship wants me you will have to come here. I am not going to spend my time in pursuit where you are bound to elude me."

"Help! help! help!" cried the agonized tones of a female in distress.

This was too much for the chivalry of Captain Williams, and with one bound he

reached the hallway. It was entirely deserted; not a soul was there; but from top to bottom the house became filled with sounds.

Above he plainly heard a noise as though some one were engaged in driving nails into the floors; below from the basement came the steady motion made by a saw as it cuts its way through a plank, while above and below and from every direction came the sound of voices, murmuring, moaning; weeping, wailing laughing, crying; sobbing, groaning and shrieking until it seemed as if the confusion of tongues in the Tower of Babel had been revived and transported to a fashionable street in the city of New York.

The sounds were enough to shake the nerves of any man, but fear and the captain were strangers. He felt the horror of it all without a thought of escaping, and in spite of the evidences that he had seen and heard he did not and could not believe in ghosts.

"Talk about a madhouse, it is nothing to this," he thought; "and I am just as far from solving the mystery as ever."

He turned to retrace his steps to the parlor, but as he did so something brushed against his sleeve. Instantly his fist shot out with the force of a projectile from a catapult, and lo! it came in contact with a soft and yielding substance. There was a groan and a heavy fall, followed by the noise of scrambling feet and a muttered anathema in a foreign tongue.

Instantly the captain followed up the blow by throwing the light from his lantern in the direction of the sound. He caught one glimpse of an object flitting down the stairs toward the basement, and, without hesitation, he bounded in pursuit.

"I hit something more substantial than a ghost that time!" he thought. But whatever the object was it successfully eluded him, for when he reached the basement floor there was no sign of any other presence than his own. The house seemed entirely deserted. Neither was he troubled by any further manifestations from ghostland.

In descending the stairs after the gas had been so suddenly extinguished the captain had turned off each burner on his way down, and now he improved the opportunity to reopen the valve in the main, so that he could again light the rooms overhead.

Then he took a ball of stout cord from his pocket, and, after fastening the end to a timber in the cellar, he made his way slowly up the stairs again, from time to time pausing long enough to make a secure knot around every available object. Through the basement hall and into the kitchen and dining-room he went, employing himself in the same manner. Then he climbed to the parlor floor, knotting the cord to the spindles in the balustrade, and to the irons which kept the stairway carpet in place, until he had a veritable network, over which it would be extremely dangerous to travel without the aid of a light.

But his ball of cord was not yet half utilized, and he went through the parlors in the same manner and then up the stairs to the second floor.

"There," he muttered, "if ghosts walk here they won't mind the cord, but if anything else attempts to run loose around the house I am likely to hear a tumble before long."

He entered the second-story front room, and after closing his lantern took a seat in one corner, preferring to remain in total darkness. A quarter of an hour elapsed, when suddenly he was startled by hearing a heavy fall, followed by a series of groans. Springing to his feet he lighted the gas and then hurried to the door. The fall had occurred on the stairs which connected the second floor with the one below it.

The groaning continued, but it steadily receded as he advanced, and feeling certain that his trap had worked he sprang at one bound over the railing, alighting half-way down the stairs.

As he did so he heard the sound of another fall near the parlor door, and with a second gigantic bound he struck the floor in its immediate vicinity.

The flame from the gas-burner in the room above gave a very dim light, but it was

enough to disclose the figure of a girl stretched insensible upon the floor. With a smile of exultation upon his face the captain lighted the gas and then bent over her. Although a deathlike pallor was upon her face, her skin was swarthy, while her hair was straight and as black as coal.

Raising her in his arms as though she were a babe in long clothes, the captain carried her up the stairs, carefully stepping over the cords which had been instrumental in her capture.

Reaching the furnished room he placed his burden upon the couch and at once hastened for water; he had discovered that her arm was broken and that she had fainted from the consequent pain.

His back was not turned for one moment; the room was brilliantly lighted; he did not hear a sound. Yet, when he turned, glass in hand, the couch was empty! The wounded and unconscious girl had mysteriously disappeared.

V.

Yes, the girl was gone! But where?

She could not have been taken through the door, for then he must have seen the person who bore her away.

There was no other door in the room except one which led into a closet, and with a quick bound he threw it open. It was empty!

Half-bewildered, the captain rubbed his eyes as he turned again toward the couch.

Even as he turned the lights went out, but above the couch there floated a vaporlike substance which gradually grew stronger and brighter until it assumed the shape and form of the wounded girl. Her position was the same as that in which he had placed her on the couch, yet as he beheld her now there were fully two feet of space between her reclining body and the cushions beneath it. Around and about them all was intense darkness. The couch and the figure floating over it were alone illumined.

For several seconds the captain gazed in awe upon the spectacle. Then he strode forward, not with precipitation, but calmly and with deliberation.

The specter did not recede. There was no apparent effort to avoid him.

At last he reached out his hand slowly, deliberately. Once in his grasp, he felt that the apparition could not escape.

He touched it. His hand was thrust deeply into the luminous mass; but he felt nothing, he touched nothing.

His hand and his arm, half-way to the elbow, gleamed in the light, while he remained in the darkness.

Then, suddenly, while he stood thus petrified by wondering awe, the light disappeared and he stood in the center of the room surrounded by darkness.

Is it strange that his senses were momentarily benumbed with awe? Would not the bravest falter when face to face with a mystery so deep and so terrifying?

His dark-lantern was down-stairs. He had left it upon the floor in the hallway where the girl had fallen.

There were matches in his pocket, however, and he selected one, intending to light the gas and then to regain possession of his lantern.

He struck the match into a blaze. It flared up for an instant. Suddenly it was extinguished, as though a draught of air had blown it out. He felt the force of the puff of wind upon him.

He tried a second match, but it met the same fate.

A third—a fourth. The result was the same. They were instantly extinguished by a sudden and mysterious puff of air.

Several times he wheeled about in an attempt to strike the person who had foiled him, but he struck the empty air.

Suddenly he seized the couch and drew it toward him. Leaping upon it, he struck the fifth match.

It flared up brightly. No attempt was made to extinguish the flame this time. The chandelier was directly over him, and he sought to light one of the burners, but the pipes were empty.

Springing from the couch, the captain

hastened toward the door, which stood open as he had left it.

To his amazement it swung to before his eyes. He dashed the half-burnt match to the floor and leaped forward, but the door shut with a bang, and when he seized it to throw it ajar again it was locked.

With one violent effort he tore the door from its fastenings.

"One more door which won't be locked again to-night," he muttered grimly.

Then he struck another match and continued on his way to the stairs. Again a strong puff of air was blown upon him, but the match was not extinguished.

Reaching the stairs, he hurriedly descended, noticing that the cords which he had so carefully fastened there had been cut.

His lantern was gone. It had been spirited away while he was up-stairs.

Continuing on his way, the captain descended to the cellar and once more stood at the point where the gas could be turned on or off at the main.

The wrench with which the valve was opened evidently had never been removed from its place since the house was built, and it had become imbedded with rust until it was almost a part of the piping itself.

To turn the gas into the house again was the work of an instant. Then he sought to tear the wrench from its place. Strong as he was, it resisted all his efforts. At length he found an old flatiron, and using that as a hammer he succeeded in breaking the wrench short off so that it could not be utilized again, nor could another be used until the socket of the old one should be removed. That would require a hammer and a cold-chisel, and the captain felt sure that he would at least be sure of sufficient light during the remainder of his investigation.

Few men would have had the courage to continue the search longer. The captain, however, did not feel the fear which would have been natural to others. He was awed, yet angered; thrilled with wonder, tempered with chagrin.

It would be folly to say that his heart beat with the same regularity as usual. But his will was as powerful as his muscles. He had come to the house to lay the ghost. He would not be beaten by any voluntary act of his own.

Ascending to the basement, he began a second illumination.

"I will have light enough, anyway," he thought as he went from burner to burner.

Suddenly, just as he was in the act of ascending from the basement to the parlor floor, the house became flooded with strains of music so strange, so weird and yet so sweet that he paused with his hand upon the balustrade and one foot upon the bottom stair, thrilled with the melody.

Now low, plaintive, like the sobbing of a sleeping child; now swelling into full-toned harmony which filled every room in that strange house with its music, it floated from hall to hall, from roof to basement.

The captain stood listening enraptured. With such sweet strains floating about him all the unpleasant features of the night were forgotten. It was entrancing.

He did not move until the sounds died gradually away. Then, drawing a long breath, the captain thought:

"Beautiful, beautiful! Whence did it come? What instrument produced it and whose hands touched the strings? I do not wonder that Mr. Saunders was driven from the house by what he saw here, but had he stayed long enough to hear that music he would have remained."

He climbed the stairs, lighting the gas as he went, until he reached the furnished room on the second floor. There he stretched himself upon the couch to rest and lighted a cigar.

Suddenly the music began once more. Nearer and nearer it sounded, as the volume increased, until instruments and players seemed just without the door in the upper hallway.

The captain did not move. He closed his eyes dreamily; a drowsiness stole over him. At last he started a little in the effort to shake it off.

Sitting upright upon the couch he listened

still, startled by the sound of a voice singing in an unknown tongue. It seemed as though each refrain ended in a sob. Could it be the girl who had fallen and broken her arm? Was some one compelling her to sing against her will?

He tried to locate the sound, for his senses were all upon the alert again.

One moment it seemed to come from the hallway; again, he was sure that it was in the room with him. His face turned gradually toward the closet-door.

He arose slowly from the couch and drew near to the closet-door.

The voice seemed in closer proximity as he approached and then suddenly ceased altogether, ending in a low murmur, which was half-sob, half-moan—a sound which could have been produced only by pain.

The captain stepped forward quickly and threw open the door.

He was just in time. A figure was disappearing through an aperture at the back of the closet.

He stretched out his hand and seized it firmly in his grasp. A loud cry of pain attested that he had not failed this time. The girl who had fallen into his trap and broken her arm, the girl who had fainted, who had been so mysteriously spirited away, was in his grasp once more. He would see that she did not again escape.

Her wounded arm had prevented her from moving quickly enough to escape through the false back of the closet. He saw plainly enough now how the escape had been made. False panels and movable partitions were an old story to him, yet they could not explain the sights which he had seen.

"Come!" he demanded sternly. "I have you now, and I will not let you go again."

Unwillingly she issued from behind the false partition, and the captain, fearing that some secret spring might render it difficult to find the opening again, seized the sliding panel and tore it away from its fastenings.

Then he led the girl into the room and signed for her to be seated.

"Who are you?" he demanded abruptly. But she only gazed at him in amazement. She did not reply.

"Who are you?" he repeated, but still she made no answer, and he realized that she did not understand his words.

The injured arm had been rudely bandaged, showing that the girl was not alone in the house. Indeed, she was very young—not more than sixteen, and could be only the tool of some more mature mind.

The captain had an acquaintance in the next street—a physician—and he resolved to take the girl to him, leave her there and return to the house. Yet he was reluctant to leave the place, even for a moment, until the mystery was solved. However, there seemed to be no help for it. The girl did not understand him, he could obtain no information from her, and her presence interfered with his work.

At that instant there was a loud ring at the door-bell.

The captain had been summoned in the same manner once before that night. Then there had been nobody at the door.

Leading the girl by the hand he descended the stairs.

This time the alarm was real. A policeman stood without, one of the captain's own men, who was greatly surprised when he perceived who had answered his ring. He hastened to apologize for intruding, but the captain cut him short.

"Go to the next street," he said; "the number is the same as this. Call up Doctor Ingalls and ask him to come here as soon as he can. Tell him that I want him."

Then he closed the door and returned to the furnished room, still holding the girl's hand. He sought to question her by every means of which he could think, but without avail. Clearly she understood no word that he uttered and she seemed unable to comprehend his signs.

The noises in the house were stilled; the manifestations had momentarily ceased, nor were further antics indulged in while the captain awaited the arrival of Dr. Ingalls.

At last he came; a sharp double ring at the door announced his presence and the captain hastened to admit him.

"A broken arm," said the captain simply, pointing to the girl. "What do you suppose is the girl's nationality, doctor? I cannot make her out."

"Hindu," replied the doctor laconically, glancing keenly at the patient. Then he addressed a few sharp words to her in a foreign tongue.

Her face brightened at once and she answered him without hesitation.

In as few words as possible the captain related his experiences in the house. The doctor listened intently.

"I am glad you sent for me," he said. "I think that I can make your task easier. I was once a surgeon in the British Army, and spent eight years in India. There I learned to speak Hindustani. It is the language of this girl, who is doubtless the tool of some juggler, or fakir, as we call them there. Wait; I will question her."

His lips parted to speak as he turned again to the girl, but at that instant a loud hissing sound came from the doorway.

Both men turned to see what had happened, and both were filled with horror at what they beheld.

A huge python, with head erect, with distended jaws and darting tongue, with flaming eyes and loud hissing, was slowly entering at the door.

The captain started back and drew his revolver. The doctor sunk speechless and helpless upon the couch at the girl's side.

She whispered a few words in his ear. Translated they were:

"Be not afraid; it cannot harm you!"

The doctor leaped to his feet again and seized the captain's arm as he was about to fire.

"Wait," he said, "there is no danger."

The captain recovered himself instantly. Together they gazed upon the reptile, which came with every instant nearer and nearer.

Chills of horror crept over them. The girl alone seemed unmoved and gazed with placed eyes upon the intruder.

The monster continued to approach. It glided between the captain and the doctor. It climbed upon the couch and coiled itself in many revolting and hideous folds around the slender form of the girl.

Still she did not move. She seemed to await some further demonstration of the unknown power which enthralled the house.

It came.

A figure appeared in the doorway. A tall man, swarthy of skin, and lithe as a panther, appeared before them. He was naked, except for the tiger-skin which covered his loins and the sandals upon his feet. Around his neck and body, his arms and legs, were coiled a hundred serpents of various sizes and colors.

He stalked into their presence, stopping when but a few feet distant, while the serpents swayed their heads back and forth, hissing and showing their fangs venomously.

The captain raised his revolver and pointed it at the fellow's heart.

"Stop!" he ordered.

"Fire, if you will," said the Hindoo, coldly. "Your bullet will kill me, but none of you will leave this room alive. My serpents would avenge me."

"Who are you?" demanded the captain.

"I am Khadar," replied the man laconically. "Your courage has foiled me and I have come now to make terms with you."

"We will do that at the station-house," returned the captain.

"No; Khadar will never go there. See, yonder python is harmless. It is not a python, it is a mechanism. These serpents are alive, venomous, deadly. By a word I could set them loose upon the floor. They would sting you, bite you, kill you. You might fight, but you could never reach the street alive. Believe me, it is true. By another word I could turn their venom first against myself and on the morrow you and I and all who are here would be dead, swollen beyond recognition. Believe me, it is true. I have come to make terms. If you refuse we will die together."

Both men shuddered with horror at the prospect.

"Hear what he has to say," said the doctor. "I know something of the power of

these men. He does not exaggerate. Listen to him. You called me here against my will. You may risk your own life, but you have no right to jeopardize mine."

"Speak," said the captain to the Hindoo.

"I have harmed no one, although I have frightened many. Even you, who have defied me beyond all daring, are unharmed. Yet I could have taken your life at any moment," said Khadar. "Let it be as it is. I will leave the house at once; to-morrow I will leave the country, never to return. Is that not better than to shut me up in prison, even if that were possible?"

"Yes; it saves the State some expense and gets rid of you at the same time—if you keep your word."

"Khadar will keep it."

"If you do not I will find you again, and snakes or no snakes, you will not escape."

"Is it agreed?"

"Yes; but there is a condition."

"Name it, sahib."

"Explain the tricks which you have performed here, that I may detail them to the owner."

"If I refuse, what then?"

"I think I will take my chances against the snakes."

"One moment; have I your word that I may go free if I explain these mysteries?"

"Yes, if you leave the country to-morrow."

"It is well, sahib; await me here but a moment."

He turned and left the room, carrying his serpents with him. No sooner was he gone than the girl disentangled herself from the folds of the false python and sprung toward the doctor, to whom she spoke rapidly in her own tongue.

"She says her name is Numah, and that she is Khadar's niece. She does not wish to go with him. If you will make it a condition that she remains, I will give her a home in my house, where Mrs. Ingalls will soon make a capital servant of her."

Before the captain could answer Khadar returned. He was dressed, and the serpents had disappeared.

Without waiting, he launched at once into the explanation which he had promised to give.

"In my own land I was once an adept or fakir," he said, "but having disobeyed one of the laws of my sect I was obliged to flee in order to preserve my life. Having fallen from rank my power as an adept was, to a great extent, destroyed, for it is only by constant exercise of the will and by following set rules of living that the occult forces remain with the fakir. But my knowledge was great. Much of the power I had was such that I could not be deprived of it. Much that I once did by mere force of will I now do by mechanism and so-called magic. Yonder python which seemed so terrible is composed of rubber. A fine spiral spring, carefully adjusted, runs through its entire length. I guide it and work it entirely by means of silk threads which protrude from the end of the tail. It is very simple."

"Permit me to turn out the gas for a moment. Now we are in darkness. As you saw Numah before I extinguished the light, she was sitting upon the couch near you."

He spoke a few words to the girl and a moment later said:

"Look now toward the couch."

They turned.

Just above it, floating in space as the captain had seen her an hour before, was Numah, represented by a luminous mass, while all around her was intense darkness.

The apparition was both wonderful and perfect.

Again the captain stepped forward, again he thrust his hand into the luminous mass and again he touched nothing.

"Light the gas," said Khadar.

It was done. Near the closet-door was Numah, stretched upon a plate of thick glass, which was supported by standards from the floor. Behind her was Khadar.

He motioned to them to approach, and with his finger pointed through the open closet door. There upon the floor was a small dark lantern with an unusually powerful lens. Before it was a system of convex

and concave mirrors, supported by a series of rods, to which they were adjusted by thumb-screws.

"Those mirrors are so nicely adjusted," said Khadar, "and so perfect that the most acute would be deceived. Lying upon the glass as she does the light passes through it and gives her the appearance of being suspended in the air. I have only to jar the glass support and she seems to oscillate—to float in space."

"But the music!" exclaimed the captain.

"Was made by my assistant—for there is one person in the house whom, as yet, you have not seen—whom you will not see. It was purely material in every respect, and really came from different parts of the house, for we constantly changed our positions while producing it."

"It was beautiful!"

"Thanks, sahib."

"Now, tell me about these false backs to closets, the opening and shutting of doors, and all that."

"I have duplicate keys to every door in the house," said Khadar. "More, I have made movable panels in nearly every door, so that I can enter or leave a locked room at will and as silently as a ghost. The closets in each of the upper-floor rooms are very large, and in three of them I have constructed false backs, making the imitation so perfect that they defy detection. There is sufficient room behind each one of them for a person to hide. Not yourself perhaps, but for this gentleman or for Numah or for myself. In those repositories I keep my paraphernalia. If there are strangers in the house it is easy enough to avoid them by escaping from room to room through the movable panels. I was never far from your side to-night. When you were tying the cord on the stairs and in the hallways I was watching you. I warned Numah, but she was careless and fell. Only for that you would have gone away in the morning with the mystery still unsolved, sahib."

"Then I should have returned with the darkness. There yet remains one mystery, Khadar."

"What is it?"

"Your reason for these pranks?"

"Ah, sahib, by that art I have realized a fortune. This was to have been my last venture; that I have failed makes it certainly so. You will call it cheating, perhaps, yet I doubt if the law can touch me when once my work is done. This house, sahib, is worth upward of \$60,000. Ere a month more had passed I should have purchased it for a third of that amount. By frightening people away I gave it the reputation of being haunted and so discouraged the owner that he would be glad to dispose of it at a loss. I purchase, spend a small sum in fitting it up, and ultimately rent or sell it at a handsome profit. Now and then you read in the papers of a haunted house; believe me, sahib, it is either Khadar who has haunted it, or some one in a similar business. There may be ghosts, but if there are they are better employed than in frightening people and destroying the value of their estates."

"During the time that this house has been haunted, Numah, my assistant, and I have lived here, nor did the arrival of new tenants dispossess us. Many times I have had opportunities for making my fortune by theft. I could have taken jewels, bonds or plate, but I have never done so. I could not steal."

"A strange distinction, Khadar."

"To your conscience, perhaps, but not to mine. I have not stolen. I have toyed with the credulity of fools. Men are too ready to believe what they see. I have done, sahib; you will keep your word with me?"

"Certainly. Will you leave Numah to the doctor's care? They both desire it."

"Ah! Numah shall do as she pleases."

He spoke to her rapidly in Hindustani. She wavered and then went to him.

Five minutes later they left the house.

Khadar kept his word, for he has not been heard of since his interview with Captain Williams.

The Ghost of Number Forty-seven was laid, and Mr. Saunders entered once more into the peaceful enjoyment of his property.

THE

Mystery of the Front Room.

FROM THE PRIVATE MEMORANDA OF POLICE
INSPECTOR ALEXANDER S. WILLIAMS,
OF THE NEW YORK POLICE.

BY FREDERIC M. DEY.

"Is Captain Williams in?" asked a young man whose manner was filled with excitement, and who rushed with all speed into the Oak street station-house, one evening in the latter part of September, several years ago.

"He is," replied the sergeant at the desk, nodding his head toward an open door, beyond which the captain could be seen.

The young man hurried into the private office, impulsively closing the door after him.

Captain Williams looked up in surprise and bent a piercing glance upon his uncere-monious caller.

"Well, sir," he said; "what do you want?"

"I wish to speak privately with Captain Williams."

"Well, speak on; you will never have a better chance, since you closed the door yourself. What do you want?"

"My sister died yesterday morning, sir, just at daylight, at our home on Madison street," replied the young man; but his emotion was so great that he paused abruptly and sobbed aloud.

"I am very sorry for you, my boy," said the captain, kindly. "Will you tell me why you have come to me with your trouble?"

"Because I knew that you would help me. You see, sir, they placed her in what we call the front room. Her body had been embalmed, and the funeral was fixed for the day after to-morrow."

"I have been very busy all day attending to various matters, and only reached home a few moments ago—an hour, perhaps. The desire to see my sister's face overcame me, and I went to the room where they had placed her body. I was alone. The door was locked, and I turned the key and entered, closing and fastening the door behind me."

"There is a fact in connection with the preparation of my sister's body for the last ceremonies which may or may not be of importance as contributing to the incident which brings me here. My family has always been a wealthy one, and some time ago my mother fell heir to the family jewels. They were many and of very great value. At my mother's request I left them at her banker's for safe-keeping, but yesterday she directed me to get them for her. I did so, and as soon as the body of my sister had been placed in the casket, my mother locked herself in the front room, where she remained over an hour. Sir, she had been engaged in bedecking the body of her daughter with jewels. I expostulated. It was useless. She insisted that the jewels were to have been Nora's property some day, had she lived, and that she should at least have possession of them during the few remaining hours she would be with us."

"The room was nearly dark; only one gas-jet was lighted, and that was turned so low that only a blue flame was visible. As I reached up my hand to increase the light, something brushed past me in the darkness. In an instant the gas became entirely extinguished. I leaped forward. It is possible that I stumbled, but I believe that I was pushed. At all events I fell. My head either struck against an article of furniture or I received a violent blow, and then I lost consciousness."

"Only a very few moments could have elapsed during the time that I was insensible, and when I did open my eyes, the room was in total darkness."

"For a full minute I remained quiet while I recovered my scattered senses. Then I got upon my feet, struck a match and lighted the gas."

"Sir, the body of my sister had disappeared. It was not there. I looked in vain. I rubbed my eyes. I pinched my flesh to be sure that I had regained con-

sciousness. Then I shouted aloud with all my strength:

"Help, help, help!"

My voice, my cries were heard, and my mother, with two of her friends, came hurrying to the door. But they could not enter, the door was locked. I remembered that I had fastened it when I entered the room, not by turning a key, but by shoving an iron bolt into place. Sir, the bolt had not been touched. It remained as I had fixed it. I was obliged to shoot it back to permit my mother and her friends to enter.

"They came in and we searched the room thoroughly, but the body of my sister had vanished. When satisfied that it was not there, I ran through the house from room to room in a frantic effort to find some trace of my sister. The search was fruitless. She was gone. Will you come to the house with me, sir? Will you come yourself? Please do not send an officer. For some reason I feel sure that you can help me. Will you come?"

"Yes, I will go with you. But wait a moment. How many doors has that room?"

"Only one, sir."

"No others?"

"None except one which opens into a closet. That was also locked on the room side."

"Did you examine the windows?"

"Yes, sir. They were securely fastened and the catches had not been moved."

"You are sure about that?"

"Positive."

"On which floor is the room located?"

"The third floor, front."

"Supposing that your sister was alive, you say there was no way in which she could have left the room without shoving back the bolt of the door by which you entered?"

"Absolutely no possible way, sir."

"Of what did she die?"

"Pneumonia."

"Ah, yes. Your name is—"

"John Newcomb. My sister's name was Nora."

"When had your mother been in the room last?"

"About an hour before I visited it."

"Your sister's body was there then?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the jewels?"

"Were as my mother had arranged them."

"When you entered the room the gas was very low, you say; still, you must have been able to distinguish objects."

"Yes, sir."

"Was the body of your sister there then?"

"I am willing to swear that it was, sir, and still I am forced to admit that I may be mistaken. I am very sure that I would have noticed its absence at once, and yet events followed each other so quickly that I still feel dazed when my mind goes back to that moment. Of one thing, however, I am absolutely positive."

"What is that?"

"That the body of my sister was in the room an hour before I entered it. My mother went in at that time, and two of her friends were with her. They all saw Nora then."

"In what part of the house did your mother remain during the interval between the time when she last saw your sister's body and the time when you went to the room alone?"

"In the second floor back room."

"All the time?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was she alone?"

"No, sir. There were two lady friends with her."

"The same who had been to the room above?"

"Yes, sir."

"Were there other people in the house?"

"Only a servant in the basement. There is another point, sir. The door leading to the hallway from the room where my mother was sitting was open all the time. It would have been an utter impossibility for anybody to have passed up or down the stairs without attracting attention from that room."

"You are positive of that?"

"Absolutely certain."

"Was the room from which the body of your sister disappeared the same that she occupied for a sleeping apartment during her life?"

"Yes, sir; the same."

"One more question: Was it known outside of your immediate family that your sister's body was bedecked with valuable jewels?"

"I do not think so, sir."

"They were very valuable?"

"Yes, sir; of great value."

"Some one was evidently in the room when you entered it, the purpose being to despoil the body of its riches. Your entrance surprised them at work, and the only recourse was to knock you down. Then, doubtless fearing that there would not be time in which to carry out the original idea, the body was taken that it might be robbed of its jewels at leisure. Come, let us go now."

When the house was reached, everything was found to be exactly as John Newcomb had described it. The captain directed the young man to lead him at once to the room where the missing body had been.

The apartment was supplied with two doors and two windows. Of the doors, one opened into the hallway and the other into a closet, precisely as the young man had described them. The windows were fastened, and Newcomb assured the captain that the catches had not been molested since the body was first placed in the room.

In the room itself the captain found nothing which might aid in the search. The body of the girl had disappeared in some mysterious manner, but it, or the person or persons who had stolen it, had left no clue behind.

The general paraphernalia of such occasions, and even the peculiar and indescribable odor which hangs about a room of death were there as evidences of the truth of the story that he had heard. But the body was not to be found.

"There is no doubt that your sister was dead, of course. The coroner has been here and the body has been embalmed. It follows, therefore, that the remains could not have left this room without help. Now, if you are correct regarding the bolt upon that door, and if the person who took the body did not pass out that way, it also follows that there is another and secret means of entrance to and egress from this room. The next thing is to find it."

"But, sir, such a thing is highly improbable. We have—"

"Is it as improbable as that the corpse of your sister should dematerialize, or that it should arise and walk through solid walls and locked doors? Not quite, young man, and we'll begin on the least improbable theory first."

The house in which the mysterious occurrence had taken place was one of the few remaining dwelling-houses of the better class in that part of the city. Business houses, warehouses and stores surrounded it, but this particular building had been left, and it stood alone, yet crowded on either hand, a relic of lost grandeur and decayed magnificence.

Newcomb left the captain alone in the room, and for several moments he stood pondering over a story that he had learned long ago, which had referred to a house in that very neighborhood. The story related events that had happened many years before. One of the oldest men on the force had repeated it to the captain, and it had been told to him by his father, who was a policeman before him.

"Was that story true, after all?" mused the captain; "and is it at all probable that I am in the very house? It's worth investigating, at all events."

He sunk into a convenient chair and concentrated his mind upon the tale to which he had listened years before.

"Ah, yes," he mused; "I remember now; the bureaus and wardrobes were stationary—seemingly, while in fact they were 'practicable'—as an actor would say. The house was used as a 'fence' for the stolen goods and articles that had been smuggled past the customs officers. The movable wardrobes, bookcases and bureaus concealed various secret apartments and closets where the stuff was hidden away; and, what is more

important, there were several secret means of passage between various rooms and the street.

"The raid was made, the repositories were discovered and rifled, and then the places were nailed up—and forgotten. The story comes back to me perfectly now."

"Yonder is a large, old-fashioned bureau, and there is a wardrobe of the same pattern. The next thing is to ascertain if they are stationary."

The captain strode forward, and applying all of his great strength, sought to move the bureau from its place against the wall, but it remained as firmly fixed as the partition itself.

Discontinuing further effort to move the article of furniture in that way, he bent his energies to discovering the means whereby it was held in place. Apparently it was a part of the building itself, and yet the recollection of the story he had heard, together with the mystery which he was trying to solve, convinced the captain that the bureau could be moved.

Fastened to the mop-board near one end of the bureau was an ordinary stop, which had evidently been put there for the closet-door to swing against, and the captain, in stooping, steadied himself by seizing hold of the stop. It trembled in his grasp, and he paused abruptly.

Then he pressed upon it, but there were no results. Next he pulled sharply upon the stop, and he was at once rewarded by hearing a sharp click. At the same instant the stop became detached from the mop-board, except for a copper wire which was securely fastened to the other end, and which was passed through a small hole where the stop had appeared to be fastened against the partition.

A grating noise attracted the attention of the captain, and he turned his head to see that one end of the bureau was swinging away from the wall and so revealing a dark opening, which seemed to lead into the partition or party-wall between the house and the building adjoining it.

Releasing the door-stop from his grasp, it glided slowly back to its place against the mop-board, while the massive bureau returned to its former position with a click and a snap which gave sufficient evidence that it was fastened there by means of a catch, which could only be worked by using the stop.

The captain rose to his feet. At the same moment John Newcomb's step could be heard upon the stairs as he was returning to aid the officer in his search.

The captain met him at the door.

"Newcomb," he said, "have you a lamp or a candle in the house?"

"Yes, sir; there are candles."

"Bring me one, and when you have done so go down and keep your mother company until I call for you. I prefer to do this work alone."

The candle was soon brought, and when Newcomb had gone the captain locked the hall door and placed the key in his pocket. Then he returned to the bureau, after lighting his candle.

A long pull upon the stop in the mop-board, and the bureau swung out, once more revealing the aperture behind it. Then, by utilizing a heavy chair, the captain fastened the strange door ajar, and holding his candle in such a manner as would afford him the most light, he stooped and passed through the opening into the darkness and mystery beyond.

He found himself in a passage-way which was barely wide enough to admit him, for his shoulders scraped either side as he cautiously descended the iron stairs. A strong draught of air along the stairway nearly extinguished the candle, and he was forced to make frequent stops in order to avoid being suddenly left in total darkness.

The stairway which he was descending had been erected between the walls of the two buildings. That is, the house whence the body of Nora Newcomb had so strangely disappeared had in all probability been constructed after the one adjoining it. A space two feet wide had been purposely left between the walls, and that had been utilized for the secret stairway.

Suddenly the captain came to an abrupt halt. He had reached the foot of the stair-

way and stood facing a wall of solid bricks. He could see no sign of a door; no means of leaving the spot where he stood, except by returning to the room which he had lately left.

"This does not end here!" he mused. "Ah! I have it. I have reached the extremity of the building. This is the rear wall of the house, and I cannot be much further down than the level of the second floor. The only way to make a turn is by passing through the stairs which I have just descended."

He turned and, seizing the lowest step, found that it, with several others above, could be easily moved. They formed a trap-door, beneath which another flight of steps could be seen, descending in the opposite direction.

The captain continued his descent until he felt certain that he had passed below the basement floor.

Presently a strange noise arrested his attention. He listened and recognized the rumble of wheels upon the city pavement. He was beneath the street which passed in front of the house. He was also at the foot of the stairs, and before him loomed another wall of mason-work, utterly impassable.

But the same trap-door-like convenience that had been of service above availed him here, and in a moment more he was traversing a narrow corridor at right angles with the stairway. It led him about fifty feet and came to an end before a heavy door, which he closely scrutinized before attempting to open it.

As he reached out his hand to grasp the latch a faint sound from beyond the door fell upon his ears, and he paused and listened attentively.

There were voices—two of them, both masculine. He could distinguish interrogatories and interjections, but the words, owing to the thickness and compactness of the barrier, were unintelligible.

With a hurried glance around him to locate every discernible object in the narrow place, the captain extinguished the candle, which he carefully snuffed and placed in his pocket. Then, bending forward, he pressed one ear against the heavy door. Now here, now there; first at one side, then at the other; at the bottom and near the latch.

Every effort was fruitless. He could hear the murmur of voices, but could not distinguish words. The circumstance was most exasperating, and he resorted to every expedient in his power in order to hear what was being said, but without avail.

Presently he became aware that a third voice had joined in the conversation. It was louder and more stern than the others, and now and then the listening officer was able to catch a word that it uttered, but never a connected sentence.

He caught such words as "girl," "body," "idiot," and several oaths by which he judged that Nora's body was, or had been, in the room beyond the door and that he of the loud voice was incensed thereby. Then other voices joined in what seemed to be a general conversation, as though, from time to time, their owners had augmented the company which was assembled there.

The place was evidently a regular rendezvous for a gang of some kind, and every sense that the captain possessed was alert.

With his ear as close to the door as he could place it without actual contact, the officer slowly straightened his tall form.

Suddenly, when standing nearly at his full height, he fancied that he could hear more distinctly. He had found a place in the door where time and dampness had done their work. There was the smallest possible crack or check in one of the planks of which the door was constructed, and to that he pressed his ear.

Unconsciously, and while every impulse of his being was bent upon the effort to hear what was being said on the other side of the door, the captain leaned more heavily than he intended against it.

Whoever had last used the door had neglected to fasten it securely, for the instant the weight of Captain Williams was pressed against it, it gave way with a suddenness which was most startling, and the officer was precipitated into the very midst of the clandestine meeting of rogues.

Even then he would not have fallen, had

the respective floors been on the same level. But that of the room where the men were conversing was fully two feet below the level of the narrow corridor from which the captain had been listening. There were three steps beneath the threshold and over them he lost his balance.

As the door burst open he was thrown forward by his own weight, and, missing his footing upon the steps, he staggered and fell headlong, right in the midst of a dozen desperate men.

They leaped to their feet upon the first alarm. Terror, dismay, rage were pictured upon their faces. In an instant they pounced upon the prostrate form of the captain. They were a dozen against one, and that one was already down. Great as was the captain's strength, he could not cope with them under such disadvantages.

They fell upon him from all sides. They pinned him to the floor as effectually as though he were beneath the building itself.

"Kill him!"

"Cut out his tongue!"

"Knock him on the head!"

Such were the cries that he heard.

Several revolvers were pointed at him. One of the ruffians bent down and held the point of a glittering knife at his throat.

"If you move or speak except to answer my questions I'll slit you from ear to ear!" he said, hoarsely, while the others drew back, although still keeping him "covered" with their weapons.

"Who are you?" asked the man with the knife, "and how did you come here?"

"Don't you know me?" asked the captain, coolly.

"Blowed if I do!"

"Ask your friends; they know me."

"It's Williams," muttered one of them in a half-whisper without waiting to be questioned. "Boys, he must never leave here alive. If he does our jig's up!"

The man with the knife spoke again and his voice was pitilessly stern.

"I've heard of you," he said. "Now answer me. How did you get here?"

"Like the angel, I fell," replied the captain. "I reached the spot from whence I stumbled into this room, from the cellar of the adjoining house."

"What brought you? Whom were you seeking?"

"The body of Nora Newcomb."

"Ah!"

The man with the knife half-turned and, with an ugly frown upon his face, muttered between his teeth:

"Curses on you, Howland, for this night's work. You shall pay for it. Now bring ropes, some of you, and tie this 'cop' so that he cannot escape. That is right; no, a little tighter; so. Now, fix him in that chair."

They placed the captain in a chair, and then, with his own hands, he of the knife twined the rope around and around the officer's body until there seemed to be no possibility of his escape. He was helpless and utterly at the mercy of a gang of desperate men whose salvation depended upon his death. They would not permit him to escape if they could prevent it. They meant that he should never leave that room alive.

Still, there was one reason why they did not make an end of him at once. Had they known that he was entirely unaccompanied, that he had prosecuted the search for Nora Newcomb's body alone and unaided, it is probable that they would have done away with him at once.

Three of the men disappeared past the door, through which the captain had fallen, as soon as he was securely bound. He knew that they were gone to ascertain if danger threatened from that quarter. Five more went out by a door through the opposite wall, and four, including the man who had handled the knife, remained with the prisoner.

The captain felt that he was in the greatest danger. He knew that these men would not hesitate to take his life as soon as they became satisfied that the crime could not be traced to them.

The situation was desperate. Of the twelve men only four remained in the room. Now, if ever, was the time for action; and yet what could he do, bound and helpless as he was? To sit there calmly, with the rope,

like a serpent's coils, around his body, and await death like a beef in the slaughter-house, was folly. Life was worth a struggle, and if death must come it would be easier to meet it half-way than to accept it without strife.

The four men were silent. They were awaiting the return of their companions, and there was nothing for them to do meanwhile. Absolute stillness reigned, and the captain glanced from face to face, measuring in his mind the relative strength of the four and computing his own against all.

Slowly and with exceeding caution he began to expand his muscles. The cords grew tighter and cut into his flesh, but he kept up the strain, increasing it so gradually that the attention of the men was not attracted.

Suddenly he made a violent effort with arms and legs, body, chest and shoulders. A powerful man always, but a veritable Hercules in the desperation of the moment, the bonds could not withstand the strain he put upon them.

The cords did not break but the chair did. A crash and he leaped to his feet, while the coils of rope fell from him to the floor, loosened by the breaking of the chair. The captain's feet were still bound together, but his hands were free. He seized the back of the chair in which he had been bound and hurled it with all his strength at the four men as they sprung toward him. It was the scythe of Father Time—the thunderbolt from Zeus. It swept three of them from their feet, and knocked them stunned and bleeding to the floor.

But he of the knife escaped. The keen-edged weapon was in his grasp. He threw himself forward with the impetuosity of a frenzied beast. But a desperate man is always dangerous and one of Captain Williams' great strength is thrice so. Ere the wrist which wielded the knife could descend he seized it and bent it backward like a willow withe until the knife fell from the yielding grasp. Then the officer's fist shot forward like a cannon-ball and then—But how describe it? In the struggle the cord which bound the captain's feet together parted. There was a confusion of men, a myriad of arms swung about in the air, a hoarse shout or two and the flash and report of a pistol, the ugly glitter of a descending knife, hurtling chairs, a groan or two, curses, and then—silence.

The captain alone was left standing, while the faint light of the single lamp, which had marvelously escaped injury, revealed the fact that he had not come out unscathed. A tiny stream of blood trickled from beneath his coat-sleeve, ran down his fingers and fell upon the floor from the spot where a knife had pierced the fleshy part of his arm. There was a contusion upon his forehead and a scratch upon one cheek. Otherwise he was unhurt.

The cords which had bound him served to bind the senseless forms of the four men. Then he extinguished the light and waited, for there were eight others who would doubtless return—three whom he could not hope to pass in the narrow corridor which led to the house, and five who would return by a route which was in all probability as perilous, and with which he was entirely unfamiliar. His only hope was to glide past the three in the darkness if fortune should cause them to return first.

But an hour passed and they did not come. Two, and the captain was satisfied that they had made the most of their opportunity and escaped.

Then he lighted his candle and examined his captives. Three of them had regained consciousness, but they were weak and helpless in their bonds.

He left them long enough to return to the house, whence he sent John Newcomb to the station for assistance.

When the place was searched it was found that the room in which the men had been congregated was a false cellar beneath the warehouse adjoining the Newcomb residence. Dies, stamps, steel plates, inks, hand-presses and spurious bills were found, showing that a nest of expert counterfeiters had been unearthed.

In another room was the body of Nora Newcomb, unharmed by the journey it had taken through the narrow passageway from

the house and still resplendent with the family jewels it wore. The counterfeiters had learned by accident of the fortune which was left unguarded in that silent room. The secret passageway had afforded them the means of access, while the unexpected arrival of John Newcomb had compelled the robbers to resort to extreme measures.

Of the eight men who escaped seven were ultimately captured and sent to prison, but Howland was swallowed up in the darkness of that night and never again appeared.

The secret staircases were destroyed and the passageways forever barred with masonry. A huge warehouse now stands where the Newcombs once lived, and nothing but the court records, files of the newspapers and the memories of the few concerned remain as evidence of the truth of what might have been the fate of Captain Williams.

A Murder at Midnight.

FROM THE PRIVATE MEMORANDA OF POLICE
INSPECTOR ALEXANDER S. WILLIAMS,
OF THE NEW YORK POLICE.

BY FREDERIC M. DEY.

THE night was cold. The wind had driven pedestrians from the city streets to their firesides. The air was filled with sleet, which cut when it came in contact with the face.

Darkness had become a settled fact, although it was only five o'clock.

Everybody who knows New York is familiar with the tangle of thoroughfares in the neighborhood of the "Swamp." Cow-paths, sheep-trails, wood-roads and lanes of long ago have taken upon themselves the dignity of streets, but they turn in and out to avoid the ghosts of stumps and boulders.

That portion of the metropolitan police which is quartered at the Oak street station-house has supervision of this neighborhood, and Captain Williams at one time had charge of it.

The "Swamp" never sleeps. By day, when leather and paper fill the sidewalks, the inhabitants withdraw into garrets and cellars or beneath the wharves in the East River front. When darkness settles over the city they creep out in search of food and drink—and vice.

There are portions of the "Swamp" where, after dark, a well-dressed man is never seen. But on the cold evening in question, as Captain Williams was walking along Rose street, he encountered a tall, soldierly-looking man who seemed to be strolling aimlessly.

The captain was in citizen's clothes. As they met, the captain glanced sharply at the man, whose face was half-concealed by a big collar. A few yards beyond the spot where they met was a convenient hallway, and from an impulse born partly of habit and partly of the curiosity of the moment, the captain stepped quickly within the shadow, where he could see without being seen.

The stranger paid no attention to the captain. He continued on his way down the street a short distance, then turned and walked slowly back again.

Thus he passed and repassed the hallway several times, until suddenly a quick step resounded on the pavement.

Instantly the stranger hastened his pace, and presently he came face to face with a woman closely veiled. They met on the pavement directly in front of the spot where Captain Williams was standing, and the words of the man were plainly audible.

"You are late, Nora," he said.

"Hush!" she replied, quickly and sharply.

"Walls have ears, you know. I—"

Her voice sunk to a key so low that the captain could not catch another word.

At intervals, however, the man spoke, but his utterances were monosyllabic and told nothing.

Once, in reply to a remark made by her, he said:

"No, no, Nora. Fire-arms are too noisy. Leave that part of it to me."

"Hush! I say," exclaimed the woman again, and their voices once more sunk to an inaudible key.

Many minutes passed and they still conversed earnestly and with a restrained intensity which interested the listener, even though he could not hear what they said.

At last, when fully half an hour had passed, during which the man and his companion remained standing in the same place, they turned and started up the street together.

Captain Williams immediately followed, turning up the collar of his coat and bending his tall figure somewhat, the better to avoid recognition.

He drew as near to them as he could without attracting attention, and succeeded in catching a stray word now and then, but nothing which gave him any clue to their identities or to the purpose of their strange meeting.

When they reached the corner of New Chambers street they paused again, but immediately separated. Not, however, before the captain had passed them.

As he did so he overheard one sentence, so full of meaning and spoken by the woman in a tone so intense that even the officer shuddered.

"To-night at 12," she said; "you must not fail me! Then I will be free, and you will be—a murderer!"

The man answered her with a low laugh, and said something which began:

"Yes, I will be a—"

But the captain was then out of hearing.

The woman took her way across town, walking quickly, while the man turned back into Rose street.

"A murder at 12," murmured the captain. "I think, madam, that I will be on hand to prevent it, and you are the one whom I will follow."

He hurried along after the woman, keeping her well in view, but remaining far enough behind to avoid attracting her attention.

She hastened on until Broadway was reached, and there took a Fifth avenue stage, while the captain climbed upon the seat with the driver.

"Do you know me, driver?" he asked as soon as he was seated.

"I do, sir."

"All right. Just allow me to manage that door-strap for this trip. If any one leaves the stage I want to know it."

He placed his foot in the strap, thus holding the door tightly closed, and feeling assured that no one could leave the vehicle without his knowledge.

"How many passengers have you inside?" he inquired.

"Only three, sir; two men and a woman."

No one signaled the stage nor was the strap molested until Fourteenth street was reached. Then the captain felt a violent jerk.

He loosened the strap and at the same time leaned far over in order to see who alighted from the stage.

It was one of the men.

The stage started on with the captain's foot again upon the strap.

At Twenty-third street there was another signal and the second man left.

The woman was now the only passenger in the stage, and the police officer felt sure that she could not elude him.

Several blocks were traversed, when suddenly he felt a slight pressure on the strap, and he paid no attention to it, but ere they had gone another half block he became convinced that something was wrong. The strap was loose.

He sought to tighten it with his foot, but could not.

Reaching forward he seized the reins from the driver's hand and pulled the horses up sharply. The next instant he had taken a flying leap to the icy pavement.

A quick glance revealed the truth of all that he had suspected.

The stage was empty!

The woman had cut the strap and taken her departure while the vehicle was in motion.

He knew that he had discovered the fact very soon after it had happened. He remembered the gentle pull which he had felt upon the strap but a few moments before, and realized that it must have been caused by the woman when she removed the impediment to her liberty.

Did she know that she was followed? Had she recognized the captain when he passed her on the corner down town, or was the act that of an extremely cautious person?

No; the last surmise was folly. There would be more danger of exciting suspicion by the chances of discovery which she ran in leaving the stage while in motion than there would have been in boldly pulling the strap and leaving the vehicle as other people left it.

Plainly, she had realized that she was followed. The storm, the cold, the almost deserted streets, even at that hour, had given her the opportunity of which she had taken advantage.

Captain Williams paused only an instant. One glance told him that the stage was empty—that the woman had disappeared. The next was directed down the thoroughfare.

The only woman upon the street had a shawl over her head, and wrapped loosely around her figure, in a vain effort to keep out the biting wind. She carried a bundle in her arms, and was hurrying rapidly along.

While the eyes of the captain were upon her she turned into Twenty-seventh street, toward Madison avenue, and the next instant he darted after her.

"She does not walk like a working-woman," he said to himself, "and unless that woman is the one I am after, I shall have to confess that she has outwitted me."

When he reached the corner the woman was only a few yards in advance, but the captain kept steadily on until he reached her side.

Perceiving that he intended to accost her she halted abruptly, and with great dignity exclaimed:

"Well, sir?"

It was enough. The captain was satisfied. The voice and the accent, even the manner in which she spoke, were those of a refined and cultured woman.

The captain knew that he had not made a mistake. The woman who wore the shawl and carried the bundle was the same who had cut the strap in the stage.

"Pardon me, mum!" exclaimed the captain, assuming an excellent Irish brogue; "bedad, an' I thought ye war Bridget, wid th' washin' for Conant's, so I did. Oi hope I did not scare ye, mum?"

He turned before she could answer and walked hurriedly away; but he did not go far. He soon crossed the street and resumed following the woman upon the other side.

But she did not have far to go, for she soon ran up the steps of an imposing residence. Either she was remarkably expert in the use of her latch-key, or she was expected, for the door opened almost as soon as she reached it, and the next instant she disappeared.

Standing on the opposite side of the street, the captain looked at the house long and earnestly.

"A murder at 12," he mused, "and probably it is to take place there. Shall I send word to the precinct station-house or shall I keep the matter in my own hands, at least until I am more certain of the ground? My ears may have deceived me. I may be entirely mistaken in my conjectures. There are a hundred reasons why I should not send for assistance and not one to prevent me from proceeding with the investigation alone."

He looked at his watch. The hands pointed to 7.

"Five hours to wait," he said, "and—"

He paused suddenly.

Down the street, in the direction from which he had come, his quick eyes discerned a familiar figure approaching.

One glance satisfied him that it was the man whom he had seen in conversation with the woman in Rose street. He recognized the walk, the soldierly bearing, the fur coat.

"I wonder if he is going to the same house?" thought the captain.

A few moments satisfied him to the contrary, for the man in the fur coat strode past the door by which the woman had entered and ascended the steps of the adjoining house.

"They met a good way from home for

people who live so near together," muttered the captain when the man had disappeared.

He remained motionless for some time, thinking, and then started rapidly across the street.

Without hesitating he ascended the steps of the house which the man in the fur coat had entered and rung the bell.

Presently a servant opened the door.

"Does Mr. Algernon Morey live here?" inquired the captain, using the first name which occurred to him.

"No, sir."

"Can you tell me where he does live? I had the address, but lost it."

"I don't know."

"Who does live here, please?"

"Mr. Humphreys."

The captain decided upon a bold move.

Taking his card from his pocket he handed it to the servant and said:

"Take this to Mr. Humphreys and say that I would like to have a moment's conversation with him."

He was shown into the reception room, and after waiting several minutes the door opened, and an old man entered.

He glanced at the card as he came in, and in a tone which betrayed the surprise he felt, said:

"To what am I indebted for the honor of this call, captain?"

"I am sorry to trouble you, sir," returned the captain, rising and bowing, "but a police officer's duties take him into the best as well as into the worst houses in the city."

"Still, I—"

"I am in search of a gentleman named Morey, Algernon Morey. The information received led us to believe that he resided in this house. Do not be alarmed, sir," he continued, hastily, as he saw that the old man trembled slightly; "Mr. Morey is not, to my knowledge, a criminal, nor do I seek him for the purpose of making an arrest. He is possessed of valuable information with which I wish to become familiar. That is all. Is he here?"

"I do not know such a person, sir."

"Indeed; I am greatly disappointed. Do you occupy the entire house, may I ask?"

"No, sir; I do not. Circumstances have left me alone in the world, and I have let my top floor to a bachelor."

"Ah, indeed! Will you tell me his name?"

"Harvey."

"Do you know him well?"

"Not at all, beyond the fact that he brought letters of introduction from persons whom I do know well. But really, sir, I am at a loss to know why you should ask me so many questions."

"If you will pardon me, Mr. Humphreys, I will explain before I leave. Permit me to ask a few more. You must know that my motive could not be questioned. Did Mr. Harvey apply to you for the apartments?"

"He did."

"Had you advertised?"

"No, sir; never!"

"Had you ever let your rooms before?"

"No, sir."

"Had he any means of knowing that you would do so?"

"No. I had not thought of it myself, but when the opportunity came I saw no reason why—"

"Certainly not. What is Harvey's business?"

"I do not know; I—have you done, sir?"

"Not quite. Mr. Humphreys, will you permit me to spend the evening with you? From all that you have said, I am of the opinion that Harvey is the man I seek—that there is a mistake in the name."

The old man reached for the bell-cord.

"I will send your card up to him," he said; "he just came in. I heard him climbing the stairs a few minutes ago."

"Wait!" said the captain, quickly and sharply. "Let me tell you something, Mr. Humphreys. By your own admission, you are sheltering a man whom you do not know. The letters of introduction which he presented may have been forgeries. He came and requested to be accommodated in this house. Why?"

"I—I do not know. I—"

"Do not alarm yourself, sir, until there is need for it. None of us is infallible, and I may be mistaken in my conjecture, but

that Mr. Harvey had some ulterior motive in coming here I do not doubt; indeed, I am reasonably certain of it. Do you know the people who live next door east of you?"

"I do; very well, indeed."

"Does Harvey know them?"

"No; I am sure that he does not."

"How many are in that family?"

"Three: they are Leonard, his wife and his wife's sister."

The captain was about to speak again, continuing his questions, when he heard somebody rapidly descending the stairs.

Some impulse moved him to rise quickly and step behind the large tapestry curtains which hung at the window, saying to the host as he did so:

"Do not mention the fact that I am here."

The next moment there was a tap at the door, and it was opened instantly.

The man, whom Captain Williams had seen twice before, entered. He still wore the fur coat.

He was above the medium height, broad and muscular. A black mustache shaded his mouth, while an imperial of unusual length grew from his chin.

"Good evening, Mr. Humphreys," he said.

"I am going away to-night, and probably will not return for a week at least. I leave at once."

"Indeed; pleasant journey to you."

"Thanks; good-night."

He was gone.

As soon as he left the room the captain issued from his hiding-place.

Most detectives would have started at once in pursuit of the man who was about to commit a crime.

Not so the captain. He had made up his mind that he was in the right place; that the story about a journey was nothing but a ruse and a blind.

"Mr. Humphreys," he said, rapidly, "I am a police officer, and I beg that you will permit me to go to Harvey's apartments for a few moments. Whatever happens, do not mention my presence."

Without awaiting a reply, he left the room and hurried up the stairs to the top floor. It had been given over entirely to the use of Harvey.

The doors were securely locked, but a skeleton key quickly introduced the captain to the rooms.

Evidently they were the home of a person of refinement and taste. A hurried inspection revealed nothing unusual, and the captain was about to pass into the front room when he heard a key in the lock.

He glanced quickly around for a place to conceal himself. A closet door stood half open. It was the only place that offered, and he sprang inside. The next instant the man in the fur coat entered.

He removed his coat and boots, and after donning a pair of slippers, seated himself comfortably in an easy-chair, and lighted a cigar.

The captain glanced at his watch.

It was nine o'clock. There were still three hours to wait, but the game was worth it. Before him was a cunning William, who had prepared his *alibi* previous to committing the crime. Wishing to be thought out of town, he had left the house boldly, to return stealthily a few moments later.

But what did he meditate? Twice he rose and went to the mantel, but after placing his hands aimlessly upon it, returned to his seat again.

At last, when his cigar was half finished, he approached it for a third time, and, much to the spectator's surprise, calmly lifted it from its place and laid it upon the floor. Next he removed the entire front, and there before him was revealed an opening just large enough to admit a human being. It was made at the side of the chimney, doubtless was a bit of his own handiwork.

He reached through and tapped lightly upon the interior.

Tap, tap, tap, came the answer from the other side.

A moment later and light began to show through. The mantel was being removed from the other side.

"Nora!"

"All right, Charles; the coast is clear. You may enter."

With considerable exertion Harvey

squeezed through the narrow opening, until at last he stood upon the other side.

The captain at once left his hiding-place. He was anxious to hear all that was said.

"Well?" interrogated Nora.

"I am out of town; gone away for a week. Nobody suspects that I am here."

"The old man?"

"Will soon be sleeping, and when he wakes, it will be in another—"

"Hush, Charles! Is it safe to do anything before twelve?"

"No."

"Very well, at twelve, then. You will summon me?"

"Yes."

The captain returned to his hiding-place in the closet while Harvey was making his way back into his own apartments.

There was a comfortable couch in the room, and the man who meditated a terrible crime stretched himself upon it and was soon fast asleep.

II.

WHEN assured that the would-be murderer slept, Captain Williams left his place of concealment and softly passed into the adjoining room.

There, with great care, he opened the door which led into the hall and descended the stairs.

As he had expected, Mr. Humphreys was awaiting him in the drawing-room.

"Did you hear Harvey return?" asked the captain.

"No."

"He is up-stairs now, and wishes to be thought out of town. He is sleeping. I am going out for a moment, and I want you to remain here and admit me when I return."

Twenty minutes later the captain was back again. With a few words of caution to Humphreys, he climbed to the top floor. Harvey was still sleeping, and the captain concealed himself and waited.

At last twelve o'clock came, and Harvey awoke. Five minutes later the mantel had been removed, and Nora was in the room.

"Well?" she asked.

"I am ready."

"Then come."

Nora led the way; Harvey followed. They descended the stairs to the second floor. There she opened a door and gently passed through into a bedroom in which a light burned dimly.

The bed was hidden by curtains, and Nora stepped forward and drew them aside.

Then she started violently. The bed was empty!

She turned a frightened face to her companion.

"Where is he? Have you warned him? Have you spoiled it all because you feared the consequences?"

Her beautiful face seemed fiendish in the half-light of the bedroom.

"No," returned Harvey, "certainly. He is in the house somewhere. Wait here!"

The captain stepped into a dark corner.

Five minutes passed, during which the woman paced back and forth like a caged tigress. Then Harvey returned.

"He is on the lounge in the parlor, sound asleep," he said. "Come!"

They hastily descended the stairs, and paused until they stood side by side before the lounge in the parlor, upon which, silently and peacefully sleeping, was stretched the form of old Mr. Humphreys.

The critical moment had arrived. Harvey drew an Italian stiletto from his pocket and stepped quickly forward.

The captain was about to interfere, but Nora spoke again.

"Wait," she whispered, seizing Harvey's arm; "let me do it."

She snatched the weapon from her companion and bounded forward. Nora had moved so quickly that the messenger of death had begun its awful descent when the captain leaped forward to prevent the crime.

"Hold!" he cried, and Nora, thinking it was her companion who spoke, laughed aloud in reply.

The knife did not stop in its descent. It fell before the captain could reach her, while at the same instant the old man uttered a loud and piercing cry.

The captain believed that he was too late, that he had delayed too long. The stiletto had descended and was imbedded to the hilt in—what?

Not in the body of old Mr. Humphreys, for upon uttering that one wild cry he leaped from the couch and stood unharmed before him would be slayer.

The whole scene formed a tableau never to be forgotten. Harvey had turned to fly, only to find himself confronted by the tall form of the police officer.

The woman, never uttering a sound, had leaned backward, withdrawing the murderous stiletto as she did so; then she crouched on the floor, while her staring eyes emitted a gleam, half of fear and half of exultation, as though she believed her work well done and with each instant expected to see the old man fall to the floor.

Old Mr. Humphreys stood spellbound by that incident of horror. After that one wild cry he uttered no sound; neither did he move in any muscle; he stood poised upon one foot as one about to spring forward. His arms were outstretched in a gesture of aversion, and his entire aspect was one of sorrow and scorn rather than of anger.

Harvey was the first to move. He saw that two murderers were trapped; that he must escape at once if at all.

During the brief pause he seemed to measure the strength of the man who confronted him, and he suddenly leaped forward and grappled with the captain as though he would thrust him from his path to freedom.

Outwardly the two men seemed evenly matched. In stature they were nearly the same. If there existed a difference in their appearance it was in Harvey's favor.

They grappled much as a huge wolf might close with a powerful mastiff; one snarling and desperate, the other cold, firm, unyielding.

Harvey succeeded in getting his arms around the captain's body, but they were torn loose instantly. A blow from the captain's fist staggered the villain, and the next instant he was lifted off his feet and hurled half-way across the room, where he struck the floor half senseless.

With one bound Captain Williams was upon him, and in a moment more a pair of handcuffs were snapped upon his wrists.

"Lie there until I give you permission to move," said the captain sternly as he arose to his feet. "If you make any further effort to escape you must take the consequences."

Harvey scowled, but made no reply, and the captain turned his attention once more to the others in the room.

He could scarcely repress an exclamation of astonishment as he did so, for neither the old man nor his would-be murderess had moved. Both seemed petrified.

What spell held them there?

Harvey, from his position upon the floor, turned his head so that he too could see them.

"My God!" he cried, "what is it? What holds them? Are they dead?"

"Mr. Humphreys!" said the captain sharply.

But the old man did not reply or move.

"Nora! Nora!" cried Harvey, in a voice filled with anguish.

But his call had no effect upon the rigid form of his beautiful accomplice.

The captain took one hasty step forward. His right arm was extended. He was about to shake some appearance of animation into one or both of the statue-like figures.

"Stop!" cried Harvey. "Wait, for God's sake, wait a moment!"

"Why?" asked the captain, turning to him again.

"Wait!" repeated Harvey. "I see it all now! It is awful—awful! Will you take my word that I will make no effort to escape and allow me to get up?"

"No."

A large painting hung upon the wall near the captain. He seized it and threw the wire cord from its fastening overhead. Placing the painting carefully upon the floor, he tore the cord from its frame and with it bound Harvey's feet tightly together. Then he raised him from the floor and placed him upon a chair.

With a word or two of warning he re-

moved the handcuffs from Harvey's wrists and sternly ordered him to place his hands together behind his back. The man obeyed, and the irons again manacled them together.

"Now I will take your word that you will not escape," said the officer, coldly. "You know these people—the man whom you would have murdered and the woman who is your accomplice. Who are they?"

"They are husband and wife."

"And what are you to them?"

"I am Nora's brother."

The captain smiled. He did not believe that Harvey spoke the truth.

Again he turned to the spellbound pair who stood facing each other so strangely.

There was something terrible in the picture. All the worst passions of a human soul were written upon the woman's face; horror, contempt, loathing, dread, were delineated in that of the man.

The captain touched the old man lightly on the shoulder. Light as was the touch, the figure tottered and would have fallen had not the captain seized it around the body and laid it gently upon the floor.

As he did so he started up in wonder, for the position of the limbs remained the same; they had moved no more than would those of a stone image.

The aspect was terrifying, and Harvey groaned aloud.

Then the explanation of it all rushed upon the captain. In a flash he saw the reason for the strange suspension of animation.

Kneeling beside the old man, he moved his arms and legs in various positions. Wherever he put them, there they remained motionless and rigid.

Satisfied of the truth of his conclusion, the captain placed the old man in a natural and easy attitude and turned his attention to Nora.

She was still half-crouching upon the floor, the embodiment of feminine fury, but her limbs responded as readily to the touch as had those of old Mr. Humphreys.

"It was the hand of God!" exclaimed Harvey, who seemed half-paralyzed by the phenomenon he had witnessed. "The Almighty could not permit the commission of such a crime. She would have murdered him, but the blow which she struck at his heart missed its aim. Rising from the couch whereon he so nearly met his death, and upon the instant recognizing her, the old man would doubtless in his fury have slain her before our eyes had not the hand of God paralyzed him ere he could strike. She, realizing her failure, would in her madness have finished the work, but the same awful force smote her and changed her blood to ice, her flesh to stone, her heart to inanimate clay. It is the hand of God!"

"Ay," said the captain, "call it what you will, Harvey, the crime was prevented. They are both stricken with catalepsy. The explanation is plainly enough to be seen now. Both were doubtless subject to epilepsy, and the great excitement of that instant when she saw her failure and he recognized her face brought about this condition. Harvey,"—the captain spoke with great sternness—"you have lied to me, and I warn you not to repeat the attempt, for I shall find out the truth sooner or later."

"I—have—what do you mean?" murmured Harvey.

"I repeat—you have lied to me. This woman is not the wife of Mr. Humphreys. Who is she?—his daughter?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. What relation do you bear to either or both of them?"

"Nora is my wife."

"Ah! Was she subject to such attacks as this?"

"No; but—"

"Well?"

"The old man has met with them frequently."

"And she has inherited the disease. Now, sir, what is your right name?"

"Har—"

"Stop! I know better than that."

"It is the only name that I will give you."

"Very well. Later will do just as well. I have an idea who you are, and if I am right this will prove to be a dear night's work for you. It is not the first murder at midnight which you have attempted, and unless I am

greatly mistaken you were more successful before."

Harvey's face became pale as the captain spoke, but he kept his counsel and made no response.

"It was a fortunate thing that I noticed you upon Rose street to night," continued the officer, with cold irony, "and still more fortunate that I followed you into this house. Do you know anything regarding this peculiar disease with which your wife and her father are afflicted?"

"No."

The captain drew a small vial from his pocket and held it before Harvey's eyes.

"Chloroform," he said. "It was intended for you, Mr. Harvey, in case I caught you napping, and deemed it best to prevent you from committing a crime. An impulse led me to procure it, and now the necessity for its use arises. Do you also see the hand of God in that?"

"You would administer the drug to me?" cried Harvey, paling again.

"To you? No. To your father-in-law first; to your wife next. They do not breathe perceptibly, and yet I think they may inhale this. The effort shall be made."

Knowing that the remedy was the same which a doctor would use, the captain did not hesitate to utilize his knowledge and he administered the drug to Mr. Humphreys.

In a few moments there were signs of life. The face of the old man became almost purple and he gasped for breath.

Vigorous rubbing had considerable effect and presently the old man breathed more regularly and the purple hue faded from his face.

After working an hour over him the captain decided that nature would do the rest, and desisted from his work, and at last, exhausted, and with less than the strength of a child, the old gentleman returned to the consciousness of his surroundings.

When he was sufficiently recovered to speak, the captain pointed toward Harvey.

"Do you know that man?" he asked.

Mr. Humphreys nodded.

"And that woman?"

The old man looked straight into the captain's eyes instead of toward the object at which he was pointing.

"Yes," he murmured; "my daughter."

"Did you know that she was living in the next house to yours?"

"Yes."

"Did you know that she was married?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever seen her husband?"

"No."

"Do you know his name?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Stop!" cried Harvey in great excitement.

"If you have any regard for your daughter's happiness, do not mention that name. Mr. Humphreys, I am her husband's friend! I—"

The old man found strength enough to raise his head in deprecation, and the expression upon his withered face was one of scorn and loathing.

"My daughter's happiness!" he said slowly; "it is nothing to me. Yonder she lies, stricken down with the disease that has haunted me, like a shadow of the grave, for years. I would that she might never again return to life and consciousness. Are you her husband, that you plead for him so earnestly?"

Harvey hung his head in shame. He saw now that there was no hope.

The old man's eyes brightened. New strength seemed suddenly given him. He tottered to his feet and stood with trembling uncertainty, his shaking forefinger pointing straight at the bound man before him.

"Sol!" he exclaimed, his voice shaking with scorn, "you are Charles Beacon, her husband—"

The captain nodded with satisfaction and murmured:

"I thought so."

"—you. You, the man who came to me with forged letters and winning manners, are my son-in-law; and you and that soulless child have been plotting my death!"

"I see it all now," he continued, sinking upon a couch. "I knew that my daughter was living next door to me. She came there a year ago and begged me to receive her."

here. I refused. She sought me out from time to time, assuring me of her devotion, of her repentance, and of her desire to care for me in my old age. I refused. You ask me why? I will tell you. This, sir, is the third attempt that she has made to murder her father. Ten years ago she sought to poison me, and I, happening upon her as she was preparing for her crime, was so overcome by the shock that I fell in an epileptic fit such as I believe to have attacked me to-night, and she, till then in ignorance of my affliction, fled, supposing me dead.

"I made no effort to find her, and subsequently she wrote to me, relating the fact that she was married to one Charles Beacon. I made no reply, and three years later she presented herself before me and begged forgiveness.

"I was a father and had a father's heart, captain. I forgave her and took her once more into my home and heart. She said that her husband was dead and I believed her.

"At last, when she had been with me nearly a year, the moment came when she made the second effort to effect the death of her father. At that time, as now, she used a dagger. She struck me while sleeping and left me for dead. But though severely wounded I battled with death and won. Again she fled and again I made no effort to find her, believing that she would never seek me again.

"I did not hear more of her until two years ago, when I learned through the press that she and her husband had committed a most foul crime. They won their way into the affections of an old lady of Cornwall, whose wealth was enormous and who was celebrated for her charity throughout the south of England. They made her acquaintance in London, only to murder her in her Cornish home after beguiling a large part of her fortune into their hands. If I do not mistake they are wanted now by the English police for that crime."

Again the captain nodded. He glanced at Harvey and saw despair upon his face.

"Yes, they are wanted," he said; "both of them."

"Take them," continued Mr. Humphreys; "the woman as well as the man. Once she was a loving child; but that was long ago, in another country and under another name."

"Ah, well; she came to me here a year ago, but I would not again receive her. Do you wonder that I would not? Yet I could not bring myself to the point of betraying her. It is as well that I did not. You have found them both in the discharge of your duty, and I am spared the thought that I gave her up to the law."

"Again she told me that her husband was dead. She said that he had fallen overboard from a steamer while crossing the ocean, and I thought that in a fit of anger she had pushed him over the rail."

"But her coming was only another plot to destroy me, the sole object being the possession of my fortune, which becomes irrevocably hers at my death. It is a large sum, of which I have only the use during my life; I cannot will it away from her."

The captain heard a sudden noise behind him and turned quickly.

It was well that he did so, for Nora had revived while her father had been relating his sad story.

Neither of them had noticed that consciousness had returned to her, although her husband had doubtless watched every motion that she made.

The murderous stiletto had been left upon the table, and she saw it almost as soon as she saw anything.

Remaining perfectly quiet until her strength was sufficiently restored, she then with great caution rose slowly and reached forward until the weapon was once more in her grasp.

Slowly but surely then she crept nearer to the captain, whose back was toward her, and when he heard the slight noise and turned suddenly around, the stiletto was high in the air and about to descend.

In another second it would have been plunged between his shoulders.

But he turned in time. Dodging quickly he seized her wrist and wrenched the weapon from her grasp. There was fury in her face and madness in her eyes as she struggled

to escape, but he held her firmly, and she, as well as her guilty husband, knew that the moment had come when they must face the consequences of their crimes.

An hour later they were both in the station-house, and in due time they paid the penalty for the murder of Mary Penraven Trevelyan, of Cornwall, England.

Box Thirteen.

FROM THE PRIVATE MEMORANDA OF POLICE
INSPECTOR ALEXANDER S. WILLIAMS,
OF THE NEW YORK POLICE.

BY FREDERIC M. DEY.

I.

A WOMAN so closely veiled that her features could not be distinguished entered the station-house in West Thirtieth street one evening. Walking rapidly to the desk, she asked for an interview with Captain Williams.

Being presently shown into the captain's presence, she removed her veil, disclosing a most beautiful face.

Her eyes were very large and as black as sloes; restless, uneasy eyes they were, radiating a peculiar and striking brilliancy, suggestive of intense though suppressed excitement. Her hair and brows were as black as her eyes, and the contrast created by the alabaster whiteness of her complexion was both startling and fascinating. Her ungloved hands were white and delicate, with graceful, tapering fingers, which, with the richness of her dress and the refinement in her voice when she spoke, proclaimed her to be a lady who undoubtedly moved in the best circles of New York society.

"Am I addressing Captain Williams?" she asked in a low voice which, though scarcely audible, was yet perfectly distinct.

"I am Captain Williams," replied the officer. "In what way can I be of service to you, madam?"

She seated herself in the chair which he designated and for several moments remained motionless and silent, while the captain waited patiently for her to proceed.

At last she spoke, evidently after a severe struggle with herself.

"Sir," she said slowly, "I have two reasons for coming to you at this time, both of which I trust that you will appreciate. The first is, I believe, that a crime has been or is about to be committed, and the second is that I wish to throw myself upon your generosity regarding the revelation I am about to make."

"Your first reason for coming here, madam, is perfectly clear; but the second one I do not comprehend. If you mean that you wish me to assist you in shielding a criminal from justice, you have committed a grievous error."

"No, sir, not I do not mean that. No, no! If a crime has been committed let the law take its course; I shall be the last one to interfere, for I would be—"

She paused abruptly for a moment, and then continued:

"No, sir; I wish to invoke your generosity only in the event of my first suspicion being correct."

"And that is?"

"That a crime is about to be committed."

"Well?"

"In that case you can prevent it. The information which I give you will make this possible if I am not now too late, and since you will owe that much to me, will you promise to keep secret all that you discover?"

"You speak in enigmas, madam."

"And yet my words are plain enough. In one case, if the crime has been committed, you as an officer of the law, will proceed as your duty requires. In the other, if the crime has not, but may be, you take part to prevent it only as a gentleman who defends a lady who is in danger."

"Is your own life threatened, madam?"

"Perhaps. Will you promise as I have requested, sir?"

"Why do you come to me with your story?"

Why not go to your friends instead and leave me in ignorance?"

She smiled sadly.

"How long would you remain in ignorance, sir, after what I have already said?" she asked. "How many steps would I take in leaving this place before a pair of eyes would be upon me, nor be once removed until the secret I now hold should be discovered? No, sir; I have not asked much at your hands. If a wrong be done, I ask you to right it as far as possible, and to avenge it in whatever manner the law directs. If a wrong be not done, but only threatened, I ask you to prevent it and to hold your peace, that the world may not be acquainted with my misfortunes. Again, sir, will you grant my request?"

"What if I say no, madam?"

"In that case I shall resign myself to the inevitable and make no further effort to avoid the events which must take place if you refuse to aid me."

"And yet I must say no to you."

The woman rose slowly to her feet. Her face had grown white. She trembled visibly.

"I—am sorry—sir," she said, while she vainly endeavored to control her emotion. "In coming to you I believed that I—but let it pass, sir. I—I beg that you will pardon me for disturbing you."

She turned and was moving toward the door, but the captain bade her wait.

"Madam," he said, "what motive led you to me in preference to others?"

"I believed that you would aid me, and there is not one among my friends whom I can trust."

"Yet you came here prepared to confide in me, a stranger?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I do not know, sir. Call it an impulse."

"But why do you now leave without carrying out your intention? I have not said that I would not aid you; on the contrary, I am anxious to do so."

"Will you promise me that you will not betray—"

"I will promise you nothing, madam, except to render you whatever service I consistently can, and to do my duty as an officer of the law. Promises are brittle affairs, madam; they sometimes break from a very slight shock. I might make the promise you request with the deliberate intention of avoiding it later on if my judgment so dictated. An end often justifies questionable means. If you wish to tell me your story, I will conform to your desires concerning it as far as my duty as a citizen and police officer will permit me to do. I certainly will reveal nothing to others unless my duty demands it."

The captain spoke very decidedly notwithstanding the fact that he had become deeply interested in the incident. The strangely beautiful face before him, the evident sincerity depicted therein, and the pain, the sorrow, the despair in the glance of her great black eyes and in the tremor of her voice convinced him at once that the matter in hand was not one to be slighted.

"I will trust you, sir; I must trust you," she murmured.

For several moments there was utter silence, while the captain awaited the woman's story.

"Sir," she said at last, "my name is Magdalena Cordova and I am descended from an old Spanish family, whose home has been for many generations in Madrid. Five years ago I married, and two years later circumstances made the City of New York my home."

"Since my marriage death has repeatedly visited my family, until now I am alone in the world, except for the existence of one brother who is many years my senior."

"Your husband is also—"

"No, sir, no; my husband lives, but he is worse than dead, being hopelessly insane."

"Ah!"

"My family was a very wealthy one, but being greatly opposed to my marriage, nothing was left to me out of their fortune except a small annuity which my brother regularly forwarded until I came to New York."

"Where is he now, this brother of yours?"

"Two years ago he was in Madrid; after that I lost all track of him until, in order to live and to care for my little son, I have been obliged to give lessons in painting, drawing, and music."

"Well?"

"Some time ago—a year or more—I received a curious package by Express. Feeling assured that I had neither relatives nor friends who would send me, unsought, a present, I put the package carefully away unopened. A month later I received another of a precisely similar nature which I served in the same manner. Then came a third, a fourth, a fifth, and they continued to arrive at intervals of about a month, and yesterday the Expressman came to my door and left the thirteenth box."

"Box thirteen! An unlucky number, Madame Cordova. Do I understand that you have left these thirteen boxes or packages in precisely the condition in which they arrived? that you have not caused one of them to be opened?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why? What did you do or fear?"

"Death."

"From the packages? Do you believe them to be infernal machines?"

"Worse, sir."

"Worse! How can that be?"

"They must have come from brother."

"Well, even so."

"He is an expert chemist, who has passed his life in the pursuit of greater knowledge of drugs. Poisons are his delight. He blends them until their natures are changed beyond the hope of recognition, from the symptoms developed by their use, even by the most expert physicians. The different effects which he can produce by the exercise of his knowledge are truly marvelous. I fear to open the boxes, because I feel assured that death is there."

"How do you know that he is the sender of the boxes?"

"I feel it rather than know it."

"Ah! Now tell me why he has sent you so many of these boxes. If your brother is in Spain he could not learn with any certainty of your escape from the effects of his queer presents in time to send you others with the regularity he has shown. Again, so many consecutive failures would convince him that further attempts were useless unless differently directed."

"I cannot explain, sir. I can only repeat that I fear and that I have cause therefor."

"I should like to examine those boxes, madame, the whole thirteen, beginning with No. 1. Give me your address and I will investigate the matter more thoroughly."

As she was taking her departure, he said quietly:

"Madame, you laid great stress upon one point when you applied to me for aid, and you have said nothing which bears upon it. What occasion is there for secrecy, and in what way could I, by betraying the matter, injure you?"

She paused and turned her great sad eyes upon him for an instant.

"Sir," she said, "I have not yet related my story in full. I have given you only the outlines; but I have succeeded in interesting you in my behalf, since you have promised to investigate the matter. When you come to examine the boxes I will relate all there is to tell."

"Very well; this evening then, at nine."

"Thank you, sir."

She bowed and was gone.

Captain Williams had many enemies as well as friends. The incident happened at a time when he was the object of attack upon all sides. Was the woman a tool in the hands of others who had an interest in getting him out of the way? Were the boxes—Box 13 in particular—infernal machines which were intended to destroy him?

Such things were common enough. Though usually failures, they sometimes succeed.

At nine o'clock that evening Inspector Williams was admitted to the little parlor where Magdalena Cordova was at home.

She received him with the same pathetic smile on her sad-eyed face, and silently pointed toward a table in one corner of the room, whereon were arranged the thirteen

packages which were the cause of so much consternation.

The captain approached them at once and examined them critically. In size they were somewhat smaller than an ordinary cigar-box; they were neatly tied up and addressed to his hostess.

She followed him to the table, and, indicating one of them, said:

"This is the first one I received, sir; that the second, and so on, in order. The one in the center of the table is the thirteenth."

"And you believe that they were sent to you by your brother for the purpose of causing your death?"

"I do, sir."

"Why?"

"He hates me; I am in his way; my—my child will, at the age of twenty-one, inherit all of his property."

"But in that case, why does he not attack your son instead of yourself?"

"Sir," she said slowly, "my brother is a devil. To-day, when I talked with you at the station-house, I purposely deceived you in one way: I told you that I did not know my brother's whereabouts. That was false, for he is here."

"Here! where?"

"In this house, in the next room."

"Which room?"

The captain turned quickly and glanced at the doors.

"Which room?" he repeated sternly, as the woman did not reply.

She raised her hand and silently pointed toward a door.

At once the captain strode toward it.

Throwing it ajar, he passed through into the adjoining room. Then he paused suddenly, for there, cold, silent, motionless, stretched upon a bed and completely covered by a sheet, was the figure of a human being.

The woman had followed the officer. She was close beside him when he paused, and he turned his piercing eyes upon her as he asked, sternly:

"What is that?"

"My brother," she replied, in a voice which was hardly audible.

Taking one quick step forward the captain seized the sheet and drew it away from the man's face, while Madame Cordova sunk with a heavy sigh into a chair.

The face before him was that of a middle-aged man, but it was also the face of a corpse.

The eyes were opened and glazed, sightless as the eyes of death.

"What is the meaning of this?" demanded the captain sternly, replacing the sheet and turning to the woman. "Is yours the crime, and have you hoped to make me a party to it, or have you thought to make me the victim of a devilish hoax? How long has this man been dead, and by what means did he die?"

"He is not dead."

The words were uttered in a very low tone, but there was no mistaking their meaning. For an instant the captain glanced curiously at his companion.

"Is she mad?" he thought. "Is this an insane freak? Not dead!" he said. "How long has he lain there? How many hours?"

"Hours, sir! He has been as you see him now for the past thirteen months."

For a moment the captain was staggered. The announcement was startling. More than ever was he satisfied that the woman was insane.

"Tell me all about it," he said kindly, drawing a chair near to hers and seating himself so that he could watch her face as she talked.

"He came here thirteen months ago, sir," said Madame Cordova. "He arrived in the morning. I gave him that room and made him as welcome, as I could, although I was terrified by his presence. An hour later I found him as you see him now, and, like you, I believed him to be dead."

"All that day and far into the night I sat here in this very chair, half-crazed by fright. I did not know what to do, but just at midnight I decided to inform the police; but as I was about to leave the room the sheet was thrown from his face so suddenly that I was paralyzed with terror. I tried to cry out, but could not. I endeavored to run away, and

then I knew no more. In my fright I fainted away."

"It was 12:20 when I returned to consciousness, and I slowly arose from the sofa whereon I was lying, for the moment forgetful of all that had taken place."

"I had fainted away here; I returned to consciousness in the next room. I must have fallen upon the floor; I awoke upon the sofa. What had happened? I was dazed, stupefied, but recollection slowly returned, and at last, mustering my strength, I cautiously threw open the door and peered in here."

"The bed was empty!"

"I looked again; I sprang forward and examined it closely. There was the sheet which had covered his rigid form, neatly folded and laid at the foot of the bed. The pillow was smoothed and the bed in order. I was amazed and horrified. The air about me was oppressive, and instinctively, rather than from any desire on my part, I made my way to my own room, fell upon my bed, and either again swooned or slept."

"When I awoke the sun was shining. Instantly I remembered all, and at once rushed into this room."

"Imagine my horror, sir, when I found my brother there, cold and still, and covered by the sheet as you see him now."

"I believed that I had dreamed it all; that the horror of his mere presence had worked upon my mind until I was visited by the vision of terror."

"Why, certainly," said the captain, "it could have been nothing else."

"Wait, sir. Remember I am speaking of things that occurred more than a year ago."

"All day long I sought to gather courage enough to go to the police-station and report, but something held me back. I could not and did not, and that night, terrified as I was, I resolved to watch."

"Ah, sir, in that one night I lived many years, and centuries could not efface the memory of it from my soul. At 12 precisely the sheet moved again. I started to my feet to fly. I grew faint again until I thought that I should swoon away."

"Not so, however. By a desperate effort I controlled myself. It was horrifying, terrifying, awful! I saw my brother throw off the sheet which covered him. I saw him rise from the bed, remove the handkerchief from his face, fold the sheet and smooth the place where he had rested. I saw him leave the room and pass out into the street, while I remained rooted to my chair, spell-bound, unable to move."

"All night long I sat there with wide-open eyes, either unable or unwilling to move, and just at dawn I heard a key in the latch."

"It was my brother returning, and he re-entered the room, unfolded the sheet, tied the handkerchief about his face, stretched himself upon the bed and drew the sheet over him. After that he did not move."

"A few moments later I drew back the sheet and he seemed as dead then as now. He seems dead now, and yet I know he lives. At midnight every night he rises and goes out; at dawn he returns, and under the strain put upon me I am going mad!"

"No wonder, if what you tell me has actually happened," said the captain, looking at his watch. "Madame, it is now nearly 10; I will remain and watch with you this evening, and if your brother walks to-night he shall have company."

"At 12, sir; he has never failed."

"At 12, then, or between that and morning, we will solve a part of this mystery. Now for the boxes once more."

II.

ONLY one solution of the mystery occurred to the inspector, and that was the woman's insanity. The sudden and unexpected arrival of her brother, closely followed by his inexplicable death, had so wrought upon her mind that it was shattered by the shock.

But there were the boxes!

Again he stood before the table upon which they had been arranged. The packages looked innocent enough. They were small boxes carefully done up in wrapping paper.

He grasped box number one. It was so light that he fancied it to be empty. Without knowing exactly why, he felt reassured at once and laid hold of the cord with which it was wound. But as he was about to tear away the wrap of string and paper, he felt the touch of a gentle hand upon his arm, and turning quickly found that the great sad eyes of Magdalena Cordova were fixed beseechingly upon him.

"Remember, sir," she said, "that those boxes were meant for me, and that he who sent them wishes me dead. Remember again the inhuman, unnatural knowledge that is his which would enable him to kill without striking and leave no mark behind."

"Madame Cordova, do you honestly believe there is danger to one who opens this box, or any of the thirteen?"

"I do, sir, else I would have torn them open long ago. Let them remain forever unopened. Dispose of them as you see fit, only do not open them."

"But, madame—"

"Captain Williams, only rid me of the presence of that living corpse and my gratitude will be unbounded."

The captain again took hold of box number one. Again he raised it and noted how light it was. Then, taking his penknife from his pocket, he carefully severed the string and cautiously unwound it.

Again did Mme. Cordova reach out her delicate hand, but this time instead of touching her companion upon the arm, she seized hold of the box and tore it from his grasp.

"No!" she said; "if it must be opened, I will open it. You, who came here at my request, shall not be made to suffer for my cowardice. See!"

Turning, she hurled the box with all her strength across the room, where it struck the mantel and fell clattering to the floor.

Her face was as white as that of her mysterious brother in the adjoining room, and her eyes for the instant lost their sad expression and gleamed with the light of desperation.

The captain was startled. If the box were indeed an infernal machine, such usage of it would be extremely dangerous.

But no explosion followed. The officer sprang forward and picked it up. The next moment he had torn away the paper wrapping. Then, with his penknife, he cut a large hole through the cover.

A grim smile spread over his face when he realized what the box contained and remembered the fears which the terror of Mme. Cordova had caused him to entertain.

He removed the cover entirely and silently extended the box to her. She took it and, glancing at its contents, uttered one startled cry and sank, half-fainting, into a chair. To her the box was filled with horror, even though it contained nothing more than a ringlet mass of golden hair.

For a moment she sat dazed by a sudden and terrible shock. Then she leaped to her feet. Her eyes were blazing with suppressed fury, her lips were set tightly together, and her face was as white as the pallor of death.

"Quick!" she cried in a voice which was half a shriek and half a piercing whisper. "Quick! The other boxes; what do they contain? Oh, we are too late, sir; too late!"

With feverish hands she seized upon box number two, and, totally oblivious to possible danger, tore away the fastenings.

In a moment it was open before them.

There were little jewels and trinkets such as a petted child might wear; there were little gold chains and jeweled pins which bore engraved upon them the letter "J," and there was a delicate pin made of gold wire and fashioned into the written word "Juanita."

With a wild cry Mme. Cordova cast the box and its contents from her and seized upon number three.

"Pity, pity!" she cried. "Oh, my child! my Nita!"

The captain stepped forward and laid his hand upon the box as she was about to tear open.

"Wait!" he said in a tone which half-calmed her at once. "Wait, Madame Cor-

dova, before you open another box; wait and tell me what you fear. Tell me all!"

She tried to speak connectedly, but her emotion was too great for that.

"My child!" she sobbed, the tears coming at last. "She is dead! He has murdered her as he threatened, and I thought her so securely hidden away from him. But he is a devil, a human devil! Did I not tell you so? See, he has murdered her! He has taken that pretty little life that was so good, so pure! My Nita! Oh, God, my Nita!"

"Is not your child here—in this house?" asked the captain, still retaining hold of the box which she made another effort to seize.

"Yes, yes, my boy is here!" she murmured in reply. "I have two—no—no! I had two children. Juanita, my beautiful little girl, was the elder. Sir, I have been married twice. The father of Juanita is dead; my boy's father lives, but is worse than dead, and now, now, that fiend who lies in there has murdered her. It was she who stood between him and the perpetual enjoyment of his fortune. It was because I feared that he would take her life that I hid her away in a monastery in the Pyrenees Mountains, where I thought she was secure even from him. I dared not keep her with me. But he found her and killed her! Killed her! Killed my Nita!"

"Give me the box!" she cried.

"Wait!" said the captain again, "let me open it for you."

"Open it then! I cannot wait! The suspense will drive me mad!"

He opened the box and a wave of anger surged through him when his eyes fell upon several pairs of little shoes—baby shoes of various sizes such as Juanita might have worn from babyhood.

He passed them silently to her and all her strength gave way when she took them in her hands. A flood of tears gushed from her eyes; her voice was choked with sobs, and her whole form quivered with emotion.

She kissed them passionately and moistened them with her tears; she pressed them to her heart and wept again; then she leaned back in her chair, and, half-closing her eyes, murmured softly.

"The next, sir. No, stop! Pass me box thirteen. Let me have it here in my hands."

"Will you open that now?"

"No, not until the last; but when it is time I will break the fastenings myself. Something tells me that it is worse than all the others. What time is it?"

The captain looked at his watch.

"Eleven o'clock," he said.

"Then we have an hour before he will awake. We must finish before 12, sir."

Box four was opened. It was heavier than the others. Indeed, as the captain raised one after another of the little packages, he noticed that they grew steadily heavier until the last, although box thirteen was lighter even than box one. In the fourth were several pairs of baby stockings, and with them two little playthings; which the mother kissed again and again.

"Nita would be nine years old now if she were living," murmured Madame Cordova, "and these are the relics of her babyhood."

Box five contained several photographs of a beautiful child with long golden hair, and a locket.

"Open it," said the woman and the captain found upon one side a lock of raven hair and on the other a likeness of Madame Cordova herself.

Box six was quite heavy. As he moved it about in opening it the captain knew that it contained liquid. But what? Were they approaching the infernal machine at last?

He tore away the cover and exposed to view a bottle packed in cotton.

One glance at the bottle, and even the officer uttered an exclamation of dismay as he started back in order to conceal from the bereaved mother the true nature of the contents of box six.

"What is it?" she cried.

"Let us examine the next," replied the captain, evasively.

"No, no! What is it? Let me know. I will be brave."

She stretched out her hand and he silently placed the bottle in her grasp.

It contained the hand of a child preserved in alcohol.

With a cry of horror Mme. Cordova leaped to her feet, scattering the contents of her lap right and left around her on the floor.

Her hand flew to her bosom and when she drew it away a long Spanish dagger gleamed in her grasp.

There was madness in her eyes as she sprang toward the door which led into the room where her brother lay.

But the captain stopped her before she had taken the second step. Then he forcibly, but as gently as possible, took the weapon from her hand.

"What would you do?" he asked sternly.

"Do!" she cried, and then laughed wildly.

"What would you do if a fiend in human form had murdered your child and then mutilated her remains? What would you do if the devil who had wronged you, who had murdered your child, who had mutilated her dead body, was lying at your mercy in the next room with nothing but an unlocked door between you and vengeance? Do? What would I do? I would drive that dagger into his heart again and again until no heart was left."

"Placed as you are, madam," said the captain, calmly, "I would doubtless do exactly as you have threatened, and yet it would be none the less folly—an act of madness. Do you want vengeance for your wrongs? Then what would it avail to stab the dead body of him who has wronged you?"

"But he is not—"

"You say he is not dead, but he seems dead. He lies like one dead, and probably is, for the time being at least, dead to all feeling. Granted that he lives; in his present condition you might kill him, but he would not know it. Your vengeance would fail because you could not make him suffer. Wait, madam. If he wakes at 12, as you say he will, you shall have vengeance. I promise you."

He put her back gently into the chair, and then undid the wrappings of box No. 7. It contained the other hand, preserved in like manner.

Mme. Cordova groaned aloud when she saw the little hand, but she did not again attempt any violence.

What would the next box contain? The thought was horrible.

"Will you not leave the rest of them until another time?" Inspector Williams asked her, dreading the effect of so much horror upon her brain.

"No, no! Open them! Please open them all!"

The eighth box also contained a bottle filled with alcohol, and in it floated a tiny, transparent ear. It was horrible.

In the ninth box was the other ear.

The captain put the box upon the table and turned to Mme. Cordova. She was rocking to and fro in her chair moaning.

"Madame," he said, gravely, "I must refuse to continue this matter further. Human nature cannot stand it. Let us stop. See, it is now nearly 12 o'clock, nearly time for your brother to wake."

"No, no!" she cried. "We have twenty minutes, and in that time I must know all. Do you fear for my reason? Do you think that these discoveries will drive me mad? Am I going insane? Believe me, sir, the suspense of fearing what the other packages may contain is far worse than the actual knowledge would be. Open the tenth box, sir, I beg."

Without further remonstrance the captain complied with her wish and, as he had suspected, found further evidences of a horrible crime. Numbers 10 and 11 contained each a foot, preserved in alcohol. In all of the officer's experience he never felt his anger so great as then. To murder a child was bad enough, but to mutilate the innocent remains was worse. Yet even greater anger surged through his heart when he thought of the inhuman cruelty of the monster who could send such evidences of a crime so terrible to the mother of his victim.

There remained but one more of those terrible packages, and he reluctantly severed the fastenings of No. 12.

What new horror would be there? What

refinement of cruelty would be unfolded now?

He threw back the cover and drew forth a bottle, smaller than the others. One glance told him what it contained, and then with a quick motion he hid it in his pocket while Madame Cordova, realizing that it was his purpose to keep the contents a secret, sprang to her feet and seized his arm.

"Madame," he said firmly, "do not ask me to reveal the contents of the last box I opened, for I shall refuse. This is a case where real knowledge would be worse than uncertainty. You cannot see it."

She sunk back again into her chair, but her suffering had gone beyond weeping. She could only stare at the officer in wide-eyed horror; but she spoke slowly.

"I think I know without looking what he would reserve for the last. Tell me, sir, if I am right. Does the—the bottle—con—contain—Juanita's heart?"

The captain shuddered.

"I will tell you nothing, madame," he said; "and you forget that you have not yet inspected the last; there yet remains Box 13."

"True," she replied, wearily. "I think that in it I shall at last find something welcome."

The captain looked at her in surprise, and she, perceiving that he did not comprehend her meaning, added in a low whisper this one word:

"Death!"

He shook his head incredulously.

"No," he said, "not death but some new horror; what, I do not know. Do not open it; let its contents remain a secret."

"The box is mine," she replied, "and I will open it. See, I have already cut the string. Will you do me a favor, sir? Then go to that window and raise it, I am faint, I want air."

He sprang to the window and threw it open, and as he did so she tore away the cover of Box 13.

As he was turning from the open window to retrace his steps to her, she uttered one long, terrible shriek, and then slid heavily from her chair to the floor.

The captain leaped toward her, but the room seemed filled with a dense vapor which strangled him. He reeled and everything grew black, but he had presence of mind and strength enough to turn blindly toward the window again. Reaching it, he leaned far out into the cool night air, half-strangled, blinded, dizzy, almost unconscious.

Thus several moments passed. Thrice he made an effort to turn back into the room, but the deadly vapor lingered there as awful as the black-damp of a coal-mine. Strong as he was the vapor was even more powerful. He could not face it, but with his head far out of the window and his handkerchief pressed tightly over his mouth and nostrils, he knew that he could wait, in comparative safety, until the room was clear.

At last he made the fourth attempt, but although he realized that the vapor was not so dense as before, he felt that it would overpower him before he could reach the door. He tried holding his breath, but the effort availed him nothing. The poisonous fumes seemed to force themselves into his nostrils and mouth.

Then he managed to reach his watch.

The hands pointed to 12 o'clock. The hour had arrived when Madame Cordova's brother was to rise from his deathlike trance and depart upon his nightly and mysterious errand.

Pressing the handkerchief firmly over his face, the captain essayed the fifth effort. He turned heroically from the window and boldly started across the room.

Despite his great strength he tottered and staggered in the effort to reach the door. But he kept bravely on, measuring his endurance and satisfied that he would succeed.

He had almost reached it. Indeed, his hand was outstretched to grasp the knob, when the door suddenly opened and there appeared in the aperture the face and form of the man whom he had seen but a short time before lying in seeming death upon the bed. It was Madame Cordova's brother.

Evidently he had just risen, and not knowing what had occurred, intended passing through the room where so much had happened. But a glance told him everything.

The deadly vapor smote upon him as well as upon his victims; he saw the tall form of the captain almost within his reach, and with a cry of alarm he slammed the door as the officer, forgetful of his own safety, dropped the protecting handkerchief and made one wild leap forward.

The door was shut ere he reached it, but he fell against it with all his strength, again half-unconscious, but realizing that he must pass through.

The fleeing man had managed to turn the key, but the door was burst from its fastenings, and Captain Williams staggered through into the adjoining room.

The man was gone. The captain heard him removing the fastenings from the front door, flying as for his life.

Making one desperate effort he bounded after him, and succeeded in reaching the door just as the escaping villain gained the pavement.

Without hesitation the captain leaped into the air, clearing the flight of stone steps at a single bound and alighting within reach of the flying man.

Stretching forth his hand he seized him in an iron grasp, and then—

Something struck him in the face; something which blinded and smothered him. He knew that the man had thrown some liquid over him, but he did not loosen his hold.

He felt that his senses were leaving him, but he shut his teeth together and tightened his grasp upon the prisoner determined to hold on until the last.

III.

Quick to think and act, and realizing that only a few seconds could pass before he would be forced to succumb to the effects of the drug that had been thrown over him, the inspector made a herculean effort to detain his prisoner.

Summoning all his energies, and gathering all his great strength into one mighty effort, he seized the brother of Magdalena Cordova in his arms and rushed with him up the stone steps and passed through the doorway into the hallway of the little house.

The man was vainly struggling with all his might to free himself from that giant grasp.

Once inside the door, the captain kicked it shut. Then he felt his strength going. A faintness stole over him. His heart beat feebly. To breathe was torture.

He wondered vaguely if he were dying—if the man had deluged him with a deadly poison. The thought gave him a new lease of muscular force. It lasted only an instant, but it was enough. He hurled his burden with terrible force upon the floor, and then fell bodily upon him and clutched him by the throat with his right hand.

The man struggled, struck out with his fists, kicked and writhed, but all to no purpose, for every effort was weaker than the one preceding it.

The captain felt that he was growing numb. In less than a moment more he knew that he would be unconscious, perhaps dead; but he never once relaxed that terrible grasp upon his enemy's throat.

Fainter and fainter he grew, and tighter became his hold on the villain's throat. He could see nothing, and yet he felt that the man's tongue was protruding; that he was growing black in the face; that the terrible grip was fast choking him into an insensibility as complete as that into which he was himself sinking from the effects of the drug. Even when he had no power left in the muscles of his body, the fingers of his right hand seemed to retain their deathlike grip, and his brain was active enough to realize that, even though he died then and there, his victim could not escape, for he felt that his fingers would stiffen about his throat.

Then all became a blank, for it was nearly two hours later when the captain was again conscious of his surroundings. He was still lying upon the floor where he had fallen; the villain whom he had borne down with him was at his side, with open mouth and protruding tongue.

The officer rose painfully to his feet. There was a curious tingling through all his body.

He went to the door, opened it and stood for several moments breathing the fresh night air. It revived him greatly; his strength returned rapidly. Up and down the street he swept his eyes in search of a patrolman, but there was none in sight. The thoroughfare seemed deserted.

Returning to the hall again, he examined the body. Was the man dead? Had that terrible grip killed him? No; the heart was faintly fluttering, and a vigorous rubbing soon made him gasp for breath. Consciousness was returning, and the captain slipped handcuffs upon his prisoner's ankles and wrists.

Confident that he could not escape, even though he recovered his consciousness and strength, the captain left him there in the hall and made his way to the room where Magdalena Cordova had been prostrated by the effects of the deadly vapor which had escaped from box 13.

Was she dead? Would he find that the inhuman brother had murdered his sister?

The room was dark. It had been lighted by a lamp when he was examining the contents of the boxes. The deadly vapor must have extinguished it. Though the room had been filled to suffocation before, it now seemed clear, and the captain ignited a match and touched the lamp-wick with the blaze.

Then he glanced quickly around him. There were the boxes just as they had been opened; there were the things which had been scattered from Madame Cordova's lap upon the floor when she had risen so hastily with drawn dagger to take summary vengeance upon her brother, but she had disappeared.

The air in the room was heavy and oppressive, though by no means unendurable. From the ceiling and upon the pictures and drapery there hung a black, soot-like substance. Upon the table and carpet and over the furniture it had gathered in great beads like sweat, or as though an intense heat had blistered the varnish. The room seemed like a tomb buried for centuries and then suddenly uncovered to the light and air, yet still heavy with vapors of death and decay.

But what had become of Magdalena Cordova? Had the deadly contents of box 13 consumed her bodily?

With a shudder of horror the inspector searched every corner of the room. She was not there, and yet he knew that she had fallen prone upon the floor when the cover of the box was removed. He knew from his own experience that she must have been suffocated by the deadly vapor.

Where was she?

He strode hastily to the door which opened into the room where the living corpse had lain, carrying the lamp with him as he went.

His first glance as he entered was toward the bed, and there by its side stood Madame Cordova with uplifted dagger.

As he discovered her the dagger descended and was buried to the hilt in the mattress. He stood still in the doorway and watched her. Again and again she raised the weapon and drove it home in the empty bed. She uttered no sound. Her face, as white as the sheet which she was perforating with her savage dagger strokes, was drawn and haggard almost beyond recognition. Her teeth were set tightly together, and upon her lips stood drops of blood, showing that she had bitten through them. She stood half facing him as he watched her from the doorway, but she did not see him, although her eyes were wide open, staring, and mad with horror and despair.

Again, again, and still again, she drove the dagger deep into the bed with the precision and the regularity of an automaton. The sight was horrible, yet fascinating. Then Inspector Williams stepped forward and spoke her name softly, for he saw that she was crazed; but, although he spoke distinctly, she seemed not to hear his voice and continued her attack upon the vacant bed. Again he spoke to her, more loudly than before, but still she paid no heed.

"Magdalena!" he said, sharply.

She turned as though she had received electric shock. Then she uttered a long cry, which ended in a burst of laughter—the laugh of one who had gone mad.

"Ah! there you are!" she cried, "My brother whom I thought I was stabbing to death here, was stealing upon me from behind! Murderer! Villain! Coward! Assassin!"

She drew near to the captain with a slow and cautious tread, such as the panther employs when it steals upon its prey unseen.

Thinking to quiet her, the captain again uttered her name.

"Magdalena!" he said.

She laughed softly, still drawing nearer to him with that slow, catlike tread, and with the Spanish dagger held firmly in her hand.

"Antonio, my brother," she said, calmly, "pray while yet you have time, for I am going to kill you. All your hellish knowledge of poisons cannot avail you now, for you must die. See! I hold the dagger ready! it thirsts for your blood, and you cannot escape. I am mad, Antonio, mad! Your cruelty has stolen my reason, and for it you shall die. The madness in my eye holds you spellbound, so that you cannot move to escape me. See! I draw nearer—nearer—nearer! When I reach you I shall strike, and you will die!"

Step by step she approached slowly.

The captain fully realized that he could not stop her—that he could not convince her that he was not her brother Antonio, and he braced himself for the struggle which he knew must come.

Her eyes seemed to grow larger and wilder as she drew nearer to her intended victim, but she never once hastened her slow, creeping, cat-like approach.

Suddenly he bounded forward and seized her wrists. His attack was so swift, and she was so confident in her fancy that he was held spellbound by the glance of her maddened eyes, that he seized her before she could avoid him.

But the strength of madness was in her slender frame, and powerful as was the officer, she wrenched herself free from his grip in an instant.

With a wild scream of demoniac fury she sprung upon him. The dagger descended and would have been buried in his heart, but with a mighty effort he knocked the blow aside, so that the point of the weapon only grazed him.

Again he seized her and again she wrenched herself free from his grasp. Then she leaped away from him and half crouched upon the floor, as if preparing to spring upon him. Her beautiful face was distorted out of all semblance to its former beauty by the fury of her madness.

"Will you foil me again, Antonio?" she hissed; and then that low, chuckling laugh of utter and insane rage broke from her once more.

"No, no!" she continued, "not again; you foiled me once, my brother, but not again—not again; no, no, not again!"

"Antonio, where is Juanita? What have you done with her—with my beautiful child? You would not harm her, would you, my brother? No, no, you would not harm her!"

She was creeping nearer with the utterance of each word. The captain watched her narrowly, for he saw that her words were but an exhibition of insane cunning, and that with every instant she was preparing to spring upon him again.

He did not wait for the attack, but advanced boldly upon her, with his piercing eyes fixed upon hers, so wild and so filled with terror.

At first she recoiled; but then uttering a wild laugh of fury she launched herself forward, and the next moment she was in his grasp.

This time she did not wrench herself free. Her strength was giving out, and he easily took the dagger from her hand. From the personification of fury she suddenly became as passive as a child, and permitted herself to be led unresistingly to a chair.

"What will you do now, Antonio?" she murmured, in a half-whisper. "Will you poison me, now that I am in your power again? Will you kill me as you killed Juanita?"

Taking her by the hand the inspector led her to the door and then into the hall.

Suddenly he paused and passed his hand over his eyes. Then he looked again. The hall was empty. Antonio was not there.

He had gone, handcuffs and all. With his hands fastened together behind his back, and his feet so shackled that it was an utter impossibility to walk, the man had disappeared as silently and as mysteriously as though the earth had swallowed him. The irons must still be upon him, or else he would have left them behind in his flight.

The captain released his hold upon Mme. Cordova's wrist, and springing to the door threw it open. The street was clear; there was no sign of his prisoner.

He turned back again into the house, closing and chaining the door behind him, and in that moment fancied that he heard a slight noise on the basement stairs.

With one bound he reached them, and the next moment he uttered an exclamation of joy, for there, nearly at the foot of the staircase, was his prisoner.

It was the work of an instant to drag him into the room where he had spent so many days in that trance-like sleep so terrifying to his sister.

Mme. Cordova was there, rocking herself to and fro in her chair, and moaning softly.

Raising his burden from the floor, the captain placed him upon the bed; as he did so, the Spanish dagger fell from his pocket, where he had placed it, to the floor.

Returning it to his pocket, he crossed the room to Mme. Cordova, and touching her gently upon the arm, asked her in a low tone to look at the man upon the bed.

She rose obediently and went with him across the room.

"I am not your brother, Magdalena," he said. "See, there he lies, there."

She looked and seemed to grow taller as she gazed. Her fingers twitched nervously, and her bosom heaved with emotion.

"Come away now," said the captain, perceiving that she recognized her brother. Then he made an effort to draw her aside.

Suddenly she turned like an infuriated tigress. Like lightning her hand flew up, seized the dagger by its jeweled hilt, and before he could prevent her or stay her hand, the weapon was buried to the hilt in the heart of the man upon the bed.